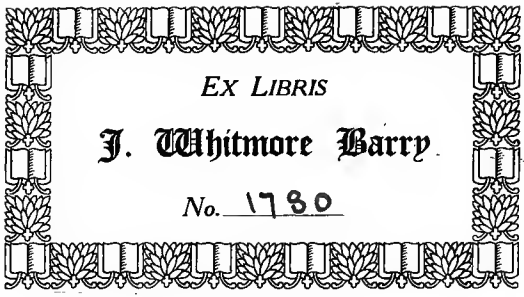

THE MODERN DRAMA SERIES

EDITED BY EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

LOVERS · THE FREE WOMAN

THEY · BY MAURICE DONNAY

LOVERS:
THE FREE WOMAN:
THEY

THREE PLAYS BY

MAURICE DONNAY

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

BARRETT H. CLARK

NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
MCMXV

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Life to Maurice Donnay is a series of love stories. He once said, "A play is a love story, and since that story is laid in various places, we are led to believe that plays differ." And Donnay's plays differ among themselves only in the degree to and manner in which they are treated. Sex is the motive power which actuates his characters: it is the protagonist of all his work. It might almost be urged that free love—if by free we mean independent of the conventions of marriage and society—is the subject of his stories. He is very little concerned with morality, and the rare occasions upon which he ventures to treat it are to be found not in the plays, but in interviews and prefaces. In his *Dedication to Molière* (in *Le Ménage de Molière*) he says: "The conjugal accident no longer amuses us: it appears to us as a social necessity, yes, a shameful but logical consequence of marriage as it is most frequently practised in the society of our day." In his best plays, like *Lovers* and *The Free Woman*, this dramatist is content merely to paint certain sections of life as he sees them, to analyze the thoughts and sensations of his lovers, and to allow the audience to draw what conclusions it will. Only by implication is it possible to read into these plays any moral attitude: Donnay is far too great an artist to *attach* a moral to his work, or attempt to develop one out of the action or the interplay of character upon character. This

of course does not mean that he is immoral in his attitude: his frankness, his sincerity, his openmindedness will surely free him of any charge of immorality. Where other Frenchmen insinuate, where Americans sentimentalize, where Englishmen either ignore or sentimentalize, Donnay speaks what appears to him as the bare truth: love, either within or without the marriage bond, is one of the greatest and most potent factors of life; it is sometimes cruel; occasionally brutal; often, because of the insincerity of human beings, a force for evil; but always a vast force to be reckoned with.

Donnay is one of the few living artists of the Realistic school of drama; he stands with Porto-Riche and Schnitzler, with whom he has many qualities in common. He possesses the brilliance of the latter, the balance of the Frenchman, his logic as well as his deep feeling; his sentiment never degenerates into sentimentality, his temperament—while it is not greatly dissimilar from that of Porto-Riche—is thoroughly healthy, and he never goes to extremes.

Donnay was born in 1859 at Paris, of a well-to-do middle-class family in the district of Montmartre, where the young Maurice was destined to begin his artistic career not many years later. In accordance with the wishes of his ambitious parents he prepared himself for the profession of civil engineer and in 1885 entered, somewhat against his wishes, a contractor's office. He was evidently ill-suited for the work, and six years later, as a result of his appearing in public at a cabaret on Montmartre, where he recited some verses of his own, he was asked to resign. Between 1889 and 1891 he wrote and recited a number of graceful if occasionally vulgar monologues, which were

keenly appreciated by the *habitués* of the *Chat noir*. In 1892 his first play, *Lysistrata*, was performed at the *Grand Théâtre;* it was immediately successful, and attracted some notice. The story and the wit of the Aristophanic comedy appealed to the kindred spirit of the French people; Donnay's own wit and originality, however, made of the Greek original a truly French play. The next important play was his most successful and is certainly his most brilliant achievement, *Lovers*. Jules Lemaître, a great authority, a keen and catholic critic, pronounced this play "probably a masterpiece." He was speaking of the piece in its relation with French dramatic literature, not merely contemporaneous writing. The praise of critics and public soon brought the young man fame, and prepared a respectful and often enthusiastic hearing for the many plays which were yet to come.

La Douloureuse presents another aspect of the eternal question of sex: in this woman's play, the dramatist tells of the effect of deep passion on a woman's character. Roger le Brun, the author of a little monograph on Donnay, gives a clear idea of the dramatist's underlying thought in this play, and makes the statement applicable to all his work: "... love, as a result of social conventions, for the most part hypocritically disguised by puerile sentimentality, is forced to do service for the basest appetites as well as the most artificial emotions; it is debased by lies, by tricks, by the avarice of man, sidetracked from its true and proper functions, going hand in hand with all our misdeeds like a monstrous and vile thing." This "debasement by lies" is the theme of *La Douloureuse* and *The Free Woman*. Donnay harks back a moment to

Ibsen, when he shows the unhappy result of a long-hidden lie. *Georgette Lemeunier*, *Le Torrent*, *L'Autre danger*, *Le Retour de Jérusalem*, are all variants on the everlasting love-motif, but with consummate artistry Donnay manages to extract each time some new and interesting idea, some novel matter for admiration. *Le Ménage de Molière*, one of his latest plays, is a long historical verse play, but again it is concerned with the love-interest, not primarily the literary or historical.

Donnay's qualities of cleverness, his broad sympathy, his penetrating insight into human nature, are nowhere seen to better advantage than in *Amants* and *L'Affranchie*, which are the first two plays in the present volume. *Amants*, while its situations are, it is true, foreign—the externals bearing upon characters known only to certain sections of Continental society—is replete with scenes of throbbing life. The story of a "free" union, which, comments Donnay, is not free after all, the love affair of two born lovers, the varying moods and tempests of their passion, the agony of the breaking-off, the final "cure," are deftly and sympathetically portrayed. There is a poetry in the situation, the spirit of which is beautifully apparent throughout. The play leaves one with that feeling of quiet sadness, which the same situation in life would leave.

L'Affranchie, on the other hand, is a trifle more purposeful, if the term be not out of place in a discussion of Donnay's plays. Here is the picture of a loving yet weak woman, a kind of chastened Iris. Antonia is the incarnation of many of the finer qualities of woman, yet she lies with the unconsciousness of the

weakest of her sex. Her lover insists that the moment she ceases to love him she tell him of it, frankly and fearlessly. As a matter of fact, she fails to realize that she has stopped loving him, even when she takes a new lover. The free union which in *Amants* was as freely broken off as it was entered upon drags to its miserable yet under the circumstances logical conclusion, because one of the two has been deceitful.

Eux! (*They!*) is a gay trifle, included here as an example of the author's earliest manner. The artificiality, the wit, the heartlessness of the young man soon gave way to the infinitely more human works of his early maturity.

There is no comment, no criticism in these plays: they are works of art and works of literature, besides being successful and interesting plays. Donnay is a phenomenon which could not exist under present conditions either in England or in America: a true artist, saying what he likes in the manner best fitted to his temperament.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PLAYS BY MAURICE DONNAY

THEY (Eux), 1889;
LYSISTRATA (Lysistrata), 1892;
THE FAMILY HOTEL (Pension de Famille), 1894;
THE AUGER (La Vrille), 1895;
LOVERS (Amants), 1895;
PAYING THE BILL (La Douloureuse), 1897;
THE FREE WOMAN (L'Affranchie), 1898;
GEORGETTE LEMEUNIER (Georgette Lemeunier), 1898;
THE MILL-RACE (Le Torrent), 1899;
THE EDUCATION OF THE PRINCE (Éducation de Prince), 1900;
THE CLEARING (La Clairière), 1900 (in collaboration with Lucien Descaves);
THE SEESAW (La Bascule), 1901;
THE ALTERNATE RISK (L'Autre Danger), 1902;
THE RETURN FROM JERUSALEM (Le Retour de Jérusalem), 1903;
THE ESCALADE (L'Escalade), 1904;
BIRDS OF PASSAGE (Oiseaux de passage), 1904 (in collaboration with Lucien Descaves);
APPEARANCES (Paraître), 1906;
THE BOSS OF THE HOUSE (La Patronne), 1908;
MOLIÈRE'S HOUSEHOLD (Le Ménage de Molière), 1912;
THE EMANCIPATED WOMEN (Les Éclaireuses), 1913.

LOVERS

(AMANTS)

A COMEDY IN FIVE ACTS

1895

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Vétheuil	A Servant
Ruyseux	Claudine Rozay
De Sambré	Henriette Jamine
Prunier	Suzanne Grégeois
Ravier	Adèle Sorbier
Schlinder	Fräulein
Gauderic	English Governess
Prosper	Denise Rozay

LOVERS

FIRST ACT

The drawing-room in Claudine Rozay's apartment, Place des États-Unis. At the back is a large bay-window through which are seen the tall chestnut-trees of the square. A Punch-and-Judy show has been set up between two doors. Down-stage sit half a dozen little girls and boys, very stylishly dressed in noticeably English clothes; behind them are their respective governesses, English and German, and then their mothers, elegantly attired young women. As the curtain rises, the play of Punch-and-Judy is drawing to a close. Little Punch is beating the policeman; then Judy, sumptuously dressed in yellow and blue, announces the end of the comedy. The audience rise, disperse, then form into groups.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Charming! Delightful! I must confess I enjoyed it quite as much as the children!

MADAME SORBIER

I laughed because they did. (*Georges and Gaston Sorbier, unbearable little rascals in sailor suits, jostle each other and quarrel.*) Georges! Gaston! Stop it! Those children are simply frightful! Fräulein, you must not leave them for a single instant—

see what happens! You need have no fear of being too severe with them.

FRÄULEIN

But Madame, if they refuse to listen to me—? M. Gaston called me a fool just now.

MADAME SORBIER

Never mind that. Now, it's about time we were going. But you, Gaston, are to copy the sentence, "I must not call Fräulein a fool," one hundred times. That will teach you a lesson! Put on your hats now. (*Madame Sorbier disappears into the background, together with Fräulein, Georges and Gaston.*)

CLAUDINE

Ladies, I should like to introduce to you M. Ernest Ravier, the author of the play you have just seen.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

So you are the clever manipulator of these little puppets?

RAVIER

Yes, Madame, I am.

MADAME JAMINE

Real talent!

CLAUDINE

M. Ravier's father is opposed to his son's pursuing a theatrical career.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Artistic murder, I call it!

MADAME JAMINE

I am sure you would write lovely plays for the Français!

RAVIER

(*Modestly*) That is not quite the same as writing for Punch-and-Judy.

MADAME JAMINE

Oh, when Scapin beats the man in the sack——!

SCHLINDER

There is not so much difference after all—amusing children and grown-ups. Men are only overgrown children.

MADAME JAMINE

For whose benefit did you make that remark?

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

But, Monsieur, for my part I was vastly amused. Why, every stroke that was showered on the policeman's back convulsed me.

SCHLINDER

Very amusing, is it not, Madame? You like to see authority get the worst of it?

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

It is always quite irresistible.

SCHLINDER

Hm! (*He joins Mme. Sorbier.*)

MADAME JAMINE

You *did* put your foot in it, my dear! Do you know who that gentleman is?

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

No.

MADAME JAMINE

Schlinder, the Chief of Police.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Heavens! And I told him I liked to see authority get the worst of it!

RAVIER

That needn't trouble you, Madame; Schlinder is not the least bit sensitive. He is most accommodating, too; for instance, if you wish to get special permission to do anything, if you want information about a cook, or wish to meet the Grand Dukes, you may safely confide in him.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

I'm very glad to know it—I must ask a favor of him.

MADAME JAMINE

So must I.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

How does he happen to be here at Claudine's?

MADAME JAMINE

He's very much in love with Mme. Sorbier.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Ah, I see.

RAVIER

She would neglect her duties and home to keep in his good graces.

MADAME JAMINE

Tell me, now—what is this Grand Dukes' business you spoke of?

RAVIER

Don't you know? I'll tell you: when the Grand Dukes of Russia come to Paris——

MADAME SORBIER (*going to Claudine*)

Dear Madame, many, many thanks for the charming party you have given my children.

CLAUDINE

But you aren't leaving so soon? The children are going to have some refreshments——

MADAME SORBIER

No, no, dear Madame, Georges and Gaston must have nothing—they've misbehaved. They fought like little urchins, and Gaston was naughty to Fräulein.

CLAUDINE

Very naughty! But let me ask you to forgive them, just this once! They won't be naughty again. You won't—will you? (*The children shake their heads*)

MADAME SORBIER

Is that the way to answer? You're like the educated donkey—you have tongues, haven't you? Can't you say no?

GEORGES AND GASTON (*sulkily*)

No!

MADAME SORBIER

No—what?

GEORGES AND GASTON

No, Madame.

MADAME SORBIER

Now run off and have some refreshments—but remember, I let you have them only because Mme. Rozay asked me—you may thank her. (*Fräulein tries to induce the children, in German, to thank Claudine, but in vain*)

ENGLISH GOVERNESS (*coming forward with Denise*)

Madame, everything is ready—shall the children come?

CLAUDINE

Certainly. (*To Denise*) You, dearest, remember, you're the hostess here—you must do the honors. At the table don't take the kind of cakes *you* like—remember, all your little friends must be served first.

Run on, darling. (*She kisses Denise effusively*) I'll come and see you soon.

[*Denise goes out with her governess, who showers advice upon her in English. The children are now eating. Mme. Grégeois is talking with Schlinder in a corner.*

SCHLINDER

I am listening, Madame.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Just think, M. le Préfet, I had to dismiss my maid only a few days ago—she'd been in service eight years—diligent and very good at her work, only she seemed too fond of the second coachman—even went to his room. Did you ever hear of such a thing?

SCHLINDER (*Prefect of Police*)

I have.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

As I had no intention of countenancing such goings-on under my roof, I dismissed them both.

SCHLINDER

You had a perfect right to do so.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

That was about a month ago, but for the past week I have been receiving anonymous letters containing threats—full of vulgar, vile expressions—things I shouldn't think of repeating to you, M. le Préfet—there are even some I don't understand myself!

SCHLINDER

I can well believe that—and then?

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Well, I suspect that these come from the couple in question, the couple I took the liberty of disturbing. Don't you think I'm right?

SCHLINDER

Yes and no.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Oh, Monsieur, if you could only see the letters! Big, scrawling—red ink—disguised—and *such* expressions!

SCHLINDER

That doesn't constitute absolute proof. I have seen letters of that sort which were written by the whitest and most delicate of perfumed hands.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

But, Monsieur, I have no other enemies. Thank God, I live in a circle which is not in the least quarrelsome; we have no adventures or intrigues.

SCHLINDER

That goes without saying. Well, in that case, then, it is very possible that your suspicion is correct—what are their names, you say?

[*He takes out a notebook.*

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

The maid's name is Sidonie Rabut—(*Spelling the word*) b-u-t.

SCHLINDER

(*Writing*) The man?

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Félix Tirviellot.

SCHLINDER

I shall have Sidonie Rabut and Félix Tirviellot summoned before one of my magistrates, who has charge of such matters. He will frighten them, so that they won't disturb you any more.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Thank you kindly, Monsieur! I hope you will give us the pleasure of calling at our home?

SCHLINDER

(*Bowing*) Madame!

[*The children continue to regale themselves with refreshments.*

MADAME SORBIER

Come quick, Schlinder; the ladies are very excited; they want to ask you a favor.

SCHLINDER

I am quite at their service.

CLAUDINE

We should like to see the parts of the city where the murderers live.

SCHLINDER

We are not acquainted with those districts, Madame.

RAVIER

If you were, you would not be here.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Try to think, M. le Préfet. Just now M. Ravier was telling us of a number of shady places: Père-Lunettes, Château-Rouge, Gravilliers Ball, St. Hubert's Cellars.

RAVIER

The Grand Dukes!

SCHLINDER

Nothing is easier, ladies——

CLAUDINE

Tell me—I'll be rather nervous—there won't be any danger, will there?

SCHLINDER

Not in the least, Madame; you will be as safe as you are in your own homes.

CLAUDINE

You are really too obliging!

SCHLINDER

As a matter of fact, those places are well-known, all classified—show-places: why, the Père-Lunettes shop has been turned into an *Artistic Cabaret*——

RAVIER

The poor man's *Chat-Noir*.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

But we'd like to visit it.

SCHLINDER

Nothing is easier. As soon as you decide on a day, you have only to let me know. And now, Madame, you must be good enough to let me go where duty calls.

CLAUDINE

You must be very busy—those two recent murders, one coming right after the other——!

SCHLINDER

Yes, I am due to appear at a garden party at the Minister of Foreign Affairs'.

RAVIER

I'm going there, too; may I accompany you?

SCHLINDER

Delighted. (*Ravier and Schlinder go out*)

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Charming man!

MADAME JAMINE

How interesting! What a lot of stories he must know!

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

There are a lot he doesn't know, too!

FRÄULEIN

(*Coming down-stage*) Madame!

MADAME SORBIER

What is it now, Fräulein?

FRÄULEIN

Madame, Georges and Gaston have overeaten. They have heart-burn—what shall I do?

MADAME SORBIER

I'll go. Madame, I beg your pardon for having brought my children!

CLAUDINE

They're lovely children.

MADAME SORBIER

Their father spoils them. School begins soon, and then I shan't be troubled; I can't decide whether to send them to the *Fathers* in the Rue de Madrid or the Dominicans at Arcueil.

CLAUDINE

Sorry I can't advise you.

[*Madame Sorbier starts to go, and this gives the signal for departure to the other guests.*

MADAME SORBIER

(*As she goes*) Good-by, dear Madame; once more, I beg your pardon. Thank you for your very kind invitation.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

(*To Claudine*) I must go, too: you must be worn out.

MADAME JAMINE

(*To Claudine*) Good-by, dear.

CLAUDINE

Please stay, my dear Henriette, we have so many things to talk over!

[*All but Claudine and Henriette Jamine go out.*

CLAUDINE

Now, how are you, dear? It's good to see you after so long! I didn't even know you were in Paris. I wrote you just on the chance of your being here.

MADAME JAMINE

It was so good of you! As a matter of fact, I haven't been in Paris this winter—we were at Beaulieu: the doctors said that Yvonne had to spend the winter in the Midi. We returned in April.

CLAUDINE

Was your friend Mme. de Barency at Beaulieu this season? I think she has a villa——?

MADAME JAMINE

Yes, yes, she was there.

CLAUDINE

Is she as gay and lively as ever?

MADAME JAMINE

Oh, don't talk about it! The poor woman has had a great sorrow—M. Ledouillard left her to get married.

CLAUDINE

No? and they were together so long!

MADAME JAMINE

Eight years.

CLAUDINE

Almost a long lease! *

* French leases are usually made out for terms of three, six, and nine years.

MADAME JAMINE

Yes, she is terribly broken up about it, poor dear! She was very fond of Ledouillard, and then—well, she's unclassed now, isn't she? Of course he acted honorably and all that—he left enough to take care of the child.

CLAUDINE

There is a child then? Girl or boy?

MADAME JAMINE

Boy.

CLAUDINE

So much the better—with a boy it's easier. Well, Ledouillard is very generous—I expected him to behave decently.

MADAME JAMINE

Yes, but granted that he left them a capital of five hundred thousand francs, that's not a fortune, especially in these days.

CLAUDINE

No, you can't do much with that——!

MADAME JAMINE

How is M. de Ruyseux?

CLAUDINE

Very well, thank you.

MADAME JAMINE

I expected to see him to-day.

CLAUDINE

He had to attend his committee meeting.

MADAME JAMINE

Always busy with politics?

CLAUDINE

Always. And are you happy, little Henriette?

MADAME JAMINE

Don't you know what's happened to me?

CLAUDINE

No—what?

MADAME JAMINE

I've lost him.

CLAUDINE

Philippe?

MADAME JAMINE

Yes.

CLAUDINE

Lost him? Did he leave you? Married?

MADAME JAMINE

No, lost, lost—he died.

CLAUDINE

You poor dear!

MADAME JAMINE

Hadn't you heard?

CLAUDINE

No—I never hear anything. You see, I live apart from the world here—I see people so seldom! When you came in wearing black, I didn't dare ask——

MADAME JAMINE

Then you didn't get my letter?

CLAUDINE

No, otherwise I should have——

MADAME JAMINE

My dear, dear friend—I was simply crazed, and so lonely!—I must have forgotten to write. Forgive me, will you?

CLAUDINE

But, my dear, I don't blame you in the least. Of course you would have written—I should have been

glad—(*stopping short*) I mean, I should have appreciated hearing from you—I should have, that is——

MADAME JAMINE

His death was so—painful—so—— There were only a few people asked to the funeral.

CLAUDINE

Really?

MADAME JAMINE

Yes—he committed suicide.

CLAUDINE

No!

SERVANT

(*Announcing*) M. Georges Vétheuil.

[*Enter Georges Vétheuil.*

CLAUDINE

(*Rising*) How are you, Monsieur? Very good of you to come!

VÉTHEUIL

Not at all, Madame. (*To Mme. Jamine*) Madame, I hope you are well?

MADAME JAMINE

Thank you, Monsieur, I am very well.

CLAUDINE

You are acquainted, then? I don't need to introduce you?

VÉTHEUIL

I was afraid of being late, but I see that the play has not yet begun.

CLAUDINE

If you are referring to the Punch-and-Judy, it's over.

VÉTHEUIL

Indeed?

MADAME JAMINE

(*Laughing*) Poor Georges, I'm not at all surprised at you.

VÉTHEUIL

In that case I am intruding—I must go.

CLAUDINE

(*Motioning him to a chair*) Please don't go!

VÉTHEUIL

But you were talking. When two women get together, there must be something important under discussion——

MADAME JAMINE

It's no mystery; I was just telling Mme. Rozay how Philippe——

VÉTHEUIL

Yes—poor fellow!

MADAME JAMINE

Well, to conclude: as I was returning to Paris, it happened. As I was saying, we had passed the winter at Beaulieu. Philippe was at Monte Carlo then, the whole time; I couldn't persuade him to keep away. He gambled; and lost, of course; lost heavily. When he came back, he tried to pay his debts out of the receipts of a gold mine in which he was interested—he invested his last sou in it. He acted on bad advice, and one morning he woke up to find himself quite ruined. He then shot himself—twice—in the head.

CLAUDINE

Terrible! I pity you from the bottom of my heart. [*Madame Jamine discreetly wipes her eyes with her handkerchief.*

MADAME JAMINE

You can imagine how terribly I felt—especially as toward the last he gambled with my money—that was one of the principal reasons why he killed himself. And now, I—I haven't a sou.

CLAUDINE

Was he the father of your little daughter?

MADAME JAMINE

No, Yvonne's father was——

CLAUDINE

Yes, I forgot—I beg your pardon. Then what happened?

MADAME JAMINE

I was simply overcome; I wept my eyes out for him—I adored him. For two months I couldn't bear the sight of a human being; then, little by little, I braced up—now, now I'm living with Prunier.

CLAUDINE

The cement manufacturer?

MADAME JAMINE

Yes.

CLAUDINE

There are two: Ernest and Jules.

MADAME JAMINE

Mine is Ernest——

CLAUDINE

Who just lost his wife.

MADAME JAMINE

Yes.

CLAUDINE

But I understood that he was heart-broken?

MADAME JAMINE

Yes, it was painful to see him—I met him first at the cemetery.

CLAUDINE

At the cemetery!

VÉTHEUIL

Tell us about it.

MADAME JAMINE

It's very simple. I used to go every week to put flowers on Philippe's grave, and one day I saw Prunier, who was bringing flowers for his wife's grave.—You see, the Pruniers' family vault is near Philippe's. I came back the next day and——

VÉTHEUIL

You said just now you used to go every *week?*

MADAME JAMINE

(*Ignoring the question*) Yes, but the guardian told me Prunier came every day. So I came back the day after, and little by little we got to talking; he told me I was like his wife—that was our point of departure. Then he saw I understood him—I used to console him—that's how——

[*Claudine turns away to keep from laughing.*

VÉTHEUIL

Nice!

MADAME JAMINE

Why are you laughing? Is what I say amusing?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, very!

MADAME JAMINE

Well, you see, I must look after things: I have a daughter to educate, and she must have a dowry, for I want her to be able to choose her own husband—a fine, worthy man.

CLAUDINE

And she's right!

VÉTHEUIL

You have plenty of time to decide.

MADAME JAMINE

One can never be too early in those matters! I may die. I don't want her to risk marrying a nobody, who will make her life miserable. I'll keep watch over Yvonne, and if my son-in-law deceives her, I'll —I'll shoot him—I will! (*She rises*)

VÉTHEUIL

(*Also rising*) Well, well! And what if she should deceive him?

MADAME JAMINE

That's different—I'll help her. Well, I must be going. Good-by, Mr. Mocker!

VÉTHEUIL

I wasn't mocking!

MADAME JAMINE

Where is my little girl?

CLAUDINE

(*Escorting Mme. Jamine toward the right*) This way, please. She must be playing with Denise. You'll find her in there. (*They go out. Vétheuil, left alone, examines a large portrait of Claudine, which is on an easel. A moment later, Claudine reenters*)

CLAUDINE

You knew Henriette Jamine before, then?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, I've met her a number of times.

CLAUDINE

She's nice, and so pretty! I don't know a prettier woman. I'm sorry I don't see more of her—she's so amusing, too! Don't you think so?

VÉTHEUIL

Oh, yes—she said some very apt things just now.

CLAUDINE

She has the knack of being able to say everything she thinks; she's occasionally ridiculous, but always charming.

VÉTHEUIL

She throws a veil of charm over the most vulgar things.

CLAUDINE

Precisely.

VÉTHEUIL

(*Pointing to the portrait*) Is this you?

CLAUDINE

Yes— in the *Age of Reason.* (*Vétheuil rises and looks at the picture*)

VÉTHEUIL

Very good. Who did it?

CLAUDINE

Sargent.

VÉTHEUIL

Remarkable. Decidedly pretty, that *Age of Reason;* what a delightful souvenir it will be! What a pity you left the stage so soon! In the very flush of youth, at the height of success! Why did you?

CLAUDINE

Because at the time I came to know the Count de Ruyseux, who did not like to have me in those surroundings—then I had a daughter. From that time on, I had another part to play, the most wonderful part that was ever written, one I never get tired of at the hundredth or even the thousandth performance—it changes from day to day, yet it always remains the same.

VÉTHEUIL

Then you leave no regrets in the theater?

CLAUDINE

Not a single one.

VÉTHEUIL

But the adulation of the crowd, that dazzlingly brilliant celebrity to which our very best authors continually refer—what of that?

CLAUDINE

Oh, there were moments——! But if you knew the price we have to pay for them! It's not a happy profession. When I consider that I, the most headstrong, distant, hard-to-get-along-with, lazy, pleasure-loving of mortals rose early every morning, ate a snatch of breakfast and ran in order to be on time for rehearsals; that I passed whole afternoons waiting about; that I went over scenes twenty times according to the caprice of manager or author—when I consider all that, I am astonished at myself, and wonder how I could possibly have endured it all!

VÉTHEUIL

Which is tantamount to saying that if a lover had been one-fourth as exacting, you would have sent him about his business.

CLAUDINE

I should think so!

VÉTHEUIL

Of course.

CLAUDINE

It is an awful life—then the pettiness in the profession! You have no idea what it's like!

VÉTHEUIL

Oh, but I have. It's like all of life, for that matter. The other day I was at the home of a good middle-class family, on their estate near Mantes. Their hallway was hung with colored supplements from the *Courrier Français!* So nowadays Forain has taken the place of cheap red cloth. Do you see the symbolism?

CLAUDINE

Yes.—No, I have no regrets for the theater. In fact, I have become very bourgeoise—I'm afraid of society, and I rarely see people.

VÉTHEUIL

How well we understand each other! We have quite the same distastes! About this time every year I detest the sight of Paris; I'm disgusted with the debauchery—the young ladies, the dear married women, the flirts and coquettes—I simply must run away!

CLAUDINE

I know exactly how you feel.

VÉTHEUIL

Then I hide myself in some quiet nook in the country: I fish, hunt, read good books, and think. In short, I live, live—here I do nothing at all.

CLAUDINE

And you are right. I too love the country—You're leaving soon?

VÉTHEUIL

At the end of the month.

CLAUDINE

Alone?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes.

CLAUDINE

(*Incredulously*) Hm!

VÉTHEUIL

Quite—indeed—as sure as——

CLAUDINE

One and one make two!

VÉTHEUIL

Absolutely alone—why should you doubt me?

CLAUDINE

Well, your reputation——! If those ladies to whom you just referred make you sick, the sickness must have agreeable compensating qualities—— You are seen about with them a good deal.

VÉTHEUIL

What does that prove? I act the part of a man who is being amused, but my heart is empty.

CLAUDINE

If you're tired of that life, why don't you marry?

VÉTHEUIL

Oh——! Couldn't think of it! My heart *is* empty, but it is not yet worn out!

CLAUDINE

The woman you'll marry some day would be pleased to hear that—Will you have something to drink?

VÉTHEUIL
Thanks, I will.

CLAUDINE
(*Ringing for a servant*) What would you like?

VÉTHEUIL
Whatever you suggest.

CLAUDINE
Brandy and soda?

VÉTHEUIL
Yes, brandy and soda.
(*Enter Prosper.*)

CLAUDINE
Prosper, some brandy and soda.

PROSPER
Very well, Madame.

CLAUDINE
Has the governess gone out with baby?

PROSPER
Not yet, Madame.

CLAUDINE
Tell her that I want baby to come and kiss me before she leaves.

PROSPER
Very well, Madame. (*He goes out.*)

CLAUDINE
Too bad you don't want to marry!

VÉTHEUIL
Why so?

CLAUDINE
Because I know of a charming young lady with a large dowry.

VÉTHEUIL
Give her to a poor man.

CLAUDINE

Perhaps you know her? Mlle. Valréal.

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, I know her—nothing extraordinary.

CLAUDINE

It's strange how indulgent men are toward the women who ruin them, and how severe on those who bring them money.

VÉTHEUIL

We must preserve our independence, you see.

CLAUDINE

Then you really don't want to marry? (*To the servant, who brings brandy and soda*) Put it there. (*To Vétheuil*) And you are sick of the "ladies." It's serious. You must now fall in love and have a great affair with some wonderful woman.

VÉTHEUIL

I lack the necessary means.

CLAUDINE

That's not nice. They're not all like that. I must cling to my illusion that there are some women in the world who still cherish love for its own sake.

VÉTHEUIL

For less than that even!

CLAUDINE

Try a pretty middle-class woman, a married woman.

VÉTHEUIL

Dangerous nowadays: they make you promise to marry them. Furthermore, a married woman is no longer romantic. I remember when I was eighteen, if one of my comrades was said to have an affair with a married woman, he at once assumed the proportions of a hero, but to-day a high-school student

would not think of such a thing—it would be so banal!

CLAUDINE

Now you're exaggerating. I firmly believe that love exists to-day. It's funny I should have to defend those women: there must be some among them who are not so black as you imagine.

VÉTHEUIL

Very few.

CLAUDINE

More than you think. But you don't seem to know just what you want.

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, I must have someone like——

CLAUDINE

Like?

VÉTHEUIL

Nothing. (*He rises*) Madame, will you allow me——?

CLAUDINE

Going so soon?

VÉTHEUIL

It's very good of you, I'm sure. I've stayed rather long for a first visit—I'm afraid I have trespassed on your good-will.

CLAUDINE

Not in the least. Stay only a few minutes longer—

VÉTHEUIL

Truly I'm not intruding? You have nothing to do?

CLAUDINE

I find you very interesting. You may go a little later, unless——

VÉTHEUIL

I am delighted to stay here with you. (*He sits down again*)

CLAUDINE

(*Sitting*) Are you bored then?

VÉTHEUIL

No, never—I have too many troubles!

CLAUDINE

What? You're happy, aren't you?

VÉTHEUIL

It's my own fault, I imagine. How is it possible for us, living in this age of self-analysis, to be entirely happy, or entirely unhappy? Happiness is a very simple matter, after all, too simple for us —unhappiness too.

CLAUDINE

How true that is! Just the same, you give me the impression of a very puzzling sort of person.

VÉTHEUIL

I do my best—only human beings are complicated mechanisms. You, too, are—so is life, so is everything—infinitely complicated. Did you ever find yourself in the middle of a forest, in one of those clearings where half a dozen paths cross, and not know which led to the château, which to the village, the farm, and the railway station?

CLAUDINE

We call that *St. Hubert's Square* or the *Place of the Guards.*

VÉTHEUIL

Exactly; well, at every step in life we are confronted with these squares, and we have no idea whither we are going.

CLAUDINE

Especially when we don't know where we want to go.

VÉTHEUIL

That is also true.

CLAUDINE

Yes, and it all goes to prove that we should remain quiet and calm and composed—then we don't have to choose a path.

VÉTHEUIL

But that is not living.

CLAUDINE

No, it isn't.

VÉTHEUIL

Do you find life amusing?

CLAUDINE

Amusing? No. Only I have a companion of whom I am sure, who is devoted, and for whom I have a great deal of affection. I have a daughter whom I adore, and I live in tolerable luxury. I have little to complain of, and I am rarely bored. That is all I can say.

VÉTHEUIL

You're not saying that for my benefit?

CLAUDINE

For whose, then?

VÉTHEUIL

You say that in order to persuade yourself.

CLAUDINE

You mustn't put such ideas into my head—it's impertinent!

VÉTHEUIL

Psychology!

CLAUDINE

(*Laughing*) Downright violence!

VÉTHEUIL

Now at this moment I enjoy that calm and quiet of which you spoke, but I feel the need for something further: emotion, trouble, joy, and even suffering—yes, suffering!

CLAUDINE

I know what you mean. When we are without those emotions, that suffering, we ask ourselves what we are doing anyhow. We seem to be losing, wasting our time—and that quiet existence is more painful than sadness itself. We think of our past sufferings in order to suffer in the present!

VÉTHEUIL

Exactly.

CLAUDINE

So, then, you seem to be ready for a great love affair?

VÉTHEUIL

You too!

CLAUDINE

Sh! (*Pointing to Denise, who is about to enter with the English governess*) There is my *grande passion!*

[*Enter Denise and her governess.*

DENISE

Good-by, mother dear. I'm going for a walk.

CLAUDINE

Good-by, sweetheart, have a nice time! (*To the governess*) Take her to the *Pré Catelan*—and don't stay too long—not later than seven.

DENISE

Are we coming back by way of the *Acacias?*

CLAUDINE

Yes, my angel, you are coming back by way of the *Acacias.*

DENISE

Then I can't be home by seven.

CLAUDINE

Why?

GOVERNESS

She told me the other day that the stylish ladies don't go there until seven.

CLAUDINE

Then you may stay till half-past. Are you glad now? Come and say good-by to this gentleman. There he is. (*Denise goes to Vétheuil, who offers to kiss her, but the child gravely holds out her hand*)

VÉTHEUIL

(*Very ceremoniously*) Good-by, Mademoiselle.

DENISE

Good-by, Monsieur.

[*Denise and the governess go out.*

CLAUDINE

The child has a character all her own. (*A short pause*) No—what you were saying just now—real happiness consists in sacrificing one's life to children!

VÉTHEUIL

Then where do *I* come in?

CLAUDINE

Don't you like children?

VÉTHEUIL

I adore them, but I have none.

CLAUDINE

Well?

VÉTHEUIL

There must be two of us.

CLAUDINE

She is not hard to find!

VÉTHEUIL

She is when you look for her—then there's a long and arduous time to wait!

CLAUDINE

Well—what shall we say, then?

VÉTHEUIL

Isn't it rather hard on a man whose heart is in the right place to put a woman whom he is supposed to love in that ridiculous and dangerous position—for the result is never sure!

CLAUDINE

Luckily everyone doesn't think as you do.

VÉTHEUIL

Then there is the great responsibility: deformed children, for instance——

CLAUDINE

You're considering extreme cases.

VÉTHEUIL

Or imbeciles, which are worse! Deformity is possible, but—no, I prefer adoption—a healthy child well brought up—like your daughter, now!

CLAUDINE

It isn't that you're afraid—you're simply like a man who buys an establishment fully furnished: you're looking for a bargain.

VÉTHEUIL

That is merely taking advantage of the folly of others.

CLAUDINE

Hardly a nice thing to say about Denise's father!

VÉTHEUIL

I don't know him. (*Rising*) I really must go now.

CLAUDINE

No!

VÉTHEUIL

I'm afraid of boring you.

CLAUDINE

You needn't be. I assure you I have nothing to do —I mean it—otherwise I should say so.

VÉTHEUIL

Then I'll stay. This is pleasant, talking with you! You are very pretty, gracious—and you seem very good!

CLAUDINE

I don't think I'm bad!

VÉTHEUIL

But I shall have to go before long. It will seem like the darkest night when I leave.

CLAUDINE

Now, now——!

VÉTHEUIL

I have passed a charming hour here with you—charming—I should like nothing better than to prolong the visit.

CLAUDINE

You may do that in your memory—and you may come again—I should like to see you occasionally.

VÉTHEUIL

The atmosphere which you seem to create about yourself has already enwrapped me; I fear if I came again it would penetrate, possess me—through and through——

CLAUDINE

I hardly think so.

VÉTHEUIL

What *do* you think?

CLAUDINE

I think that you like to make yourself agreeable to me, and that you are doing all in your power to that end—it's bred deep in your character—if you were in the presence of another woman, I think you would be absolutely the same. You see, I'm not playing the coquette with you—you are more feminine than I.

VÉTHEUIL

You believe me incapable of a true and deep sentiment, because I always seem to be making game of myself. But that is no reason.

CLAUDINE

Yes, I know—I can believe that with all your apparent skepticism you can be very tender and sentimental. You are, aren't you?

VÉTHEUIL

Like—the stars.

CLAUDINE

Yet with all your skepticism, you can be jealous?

VÉTHEUIL

I am instinctively jealous, but I restore the balance with the aid of my reason. I can be very jealous

for no reason at all, and know it all the time; but in that case I never show my jealousy.

CLAUDINE

And when you have reasons?

VÉTHEUIL

Then I am impossible: I hate the human race. If I happen to be at a social function, the hostess usually drops some remark about "not bringing your friend again"!

CLAUDINE

(*Laughing*) Just like me: ridiculous, jealous, sentimental! You've said so many things that I have thought out myself, but never put into words! Strange how much we are alike!

VÉTHEUIL

Birds of a feather, you know.

CLAUDINE

Yes—er—no! No!—Never! (*Short pause*) Are you constant?

VÉTHEUIL

Constant? That depends.

CLAUDINE

Oh!

VÉTHEUIL

(*Laughing*) I don't think we should be forever boring each other.

CLAUDINE

I'm sure we shouldn't.

VÉTHEUIL

Now with you I'd be constant, because you have every desirable quality to make a man absurdly so.

CLAUDINE

Absurdly, but not eternally.

VÉTHEUIL

You haven't enough illusions.

CLAUDINE

And for that reason, if I were in love I should be very much to blame, knowing the dangers I was exposed to!

VÉTHEUIL

Not to blame, but merely prepared, which is more amusing.

CLAUDINE

And more serious! But let's drop the subject—it's out of the question: I'm a good little stay-at-home *bourgeoise*.

VÉTHEUIL

Nonsense! You are a woman capable of love—you will love again. I'm not fool enough to say I am the man, but—you will love.

CLAUDINE

Heaven preserve me! I have no wish to go through what I have already endured! What deceit, what tears, what sleepless nights, what aching for vengeance! How mean and silly it all is! Yes, silly. And now you say it must be gone through again? And then the final breaking-off: the death, and the agony after death? That breaking-off! Can you calmly contemplate that?

VÉTHEUIL

I don't contemplate it, I try to avoid thinking of it, because in love "The only victory is flight." That is why my valise is always in readiness—that wonderful little leather valise of mine—with half a dozen shirts in it, two suits—one of them dinner dress—flasks of Eau de Cologne and tooth powder—all

ready for flight, in the manner of soldiers preparing a pontoon bridge, with their baggage on the boards. After fifteen minutes' riding, one can be at the frontier. I have noticed that invariably those moments passed in packing the valise are the worst; it's just then that friends interfere, *she* returns and cries—and you're lost!

CLAUDINE

And have you had occasion to use that valise?

[*Enter the Count de Ruyseux.*

COUNT

(*Kissing Claudine's hand*) Dearest!

CLAUDINE

(*Introducing*) M. Georges Vétheuil; Count de Ruyseux.

[*The men bow, then the Count extends his hand to Georges.*

COUNT

(*To Claudine*) Have a pleasant party?

CLAUDINE

Delightful; the children had a good time, and so did their mammas.

COUNT

Splendid!

CLAUDINE

Ravier worked the Punch-and-Judy show—he was so funny!

VÉTHEUIL

Oh, it was Ravier——?

CLAUDINE

Do you know him?

VÉTHEUIL

A young man who recites monologues and acts in private salons. Who doesn't know Ravier?

CLAUDINE

He's so amusing! He can imitate any actor.

VÉTHEUIL

He knows how to be agreeable in company—odious animal!

CLAUDINE

You're not kind!

COUNT

And how about Denise?

CLAUDINE

Denise acted the part of hostess with honor; she was quite the little mistress of the house, quick, and conscious of her own importance. What an amusing little woman she was! Do you want to hear your daughter's latest?

COUNT

Do I?

CLAUDINE

As soon as she was dressed, after lunch, she came to show herself to me, and as I was admiring her, I said: "My, my, what a pwetty dwess and what lovely hair!" She said: "Now, mother, talk like grown-up people: say 'pretty' and 'dress'; that other way isn't funny, it's childish!"

COUNT

Remarkable!

CLAUDINE

(*Turning to Vétheuil*) She's only eight!

VÉTHEUIL

Positively terrifying!

COUNT

Well, I spent a part of the afternoon with my old friend, the Marquis de Nezelles; he's going this evening to the dress rehearsal of *Tannhäuser* at the Opéra.

CLAUDINE

Lucky! I should like to have gone—I never see anything nowadays——!

COUNT

To-morrow you'll read a letter we composed together for the *Figaro*.

CLAUDINE

What about?

COUNT

That incident at the Savoy.

CLAUDINE

What incident?

COUNT

You know: there were too many guests, so that there had to be two tables. Monseigneur presided over one, and the Duke de Luynes over the other. It seems that the people at the Duke's table didn't have the same menu as those at the Orléans table. Certain papers commented on the fact, and made a number of misstatements, which we have rectified in our letter—you know, Monsieur, I am an old Royalist—does that shock you?

VÉTHEUIL

Not in the least, Monsieur—I don't dabble in politics: I am more Anarchist than anything else.

COUNT

In that event we can understand each other.

VÉTHEUIL

Temporarily, at least! (*He rises*) Madame, I really must ask your permission to go. (*He shakes hands with the Count*) Monsieur——

COUNT

Very glad to have met you, Monsieur. I hope to see you again. (*Claudine conducts Vétheuil to the door*)

COUNT

Seems like a nice fellow—very pleasant. Where did you meet him?

CLAUDINE

In Pauline Gluck's booth, at the Sale for the Benefit of Artists' Orphans. She introduced us; I thought him agreeable, not at all stupid, quite intelligent. Then I've seen him from time to time in the Boïs, and at the theater. He kept saying he was going to call, but not till to-day did he carry out his threat.

COUNT

You never said anything about him before.

CLAUDINE

Why should I?

COUNT

What sort of man is he?

CLAUDINE

I hardly know—I haven't had many opportunities——

COUNT

What does he do?

CLAUDINE

Nothing.

COUNT

Has he independent means? A fortune?

CLAUDINE

I scarcely think it could be called a fortune; he has enough to support himself comfortably.

COUNT

That is the main point.—You think him nice?

CLAUDINE

Yes, quite—he has a good disposition, too. I imagine he would be incapable of doing anything mean.

COUNT

That's the finest thing that can be said of anyone nowadays. What's his name? I didn't catch it?

CLAUDINE

Vétheuil—Georges Vétheuil.

COUNT

Wait a moment, I think I know that name. This Vétheuil was once in prison.

CLAUDINE

(*Indignantly*) Never! That's impossible! My dear, you must be mad!

COUNT

Don't get excited. In 1880, at the time of the famous Ferry Decrees, a certain Vétheuil—18 or 19 years old, who insulted the gendarmes as they were driving out the Dominicans of the Rue—Rue—never mind—was taken to the Station.

CLAUDINE

(*Reassured*) Oh, I don't deny, of course——!

COUNT

That was in 1880. We are now in 1895: eighteen and fifteen, that's thirty-three. It might very well be—I'll ask him.

CLAUDINE

If it's he, you're going to fall on his neck.

COUNT

I don't say that, but he would run a better risk of pleasing me. (*Short pause*)

CLAUDINE

Any news?

COUNT

Nothing much.

CLAUDINE

Tell me what there is. No gossip? See anyone?

COUNT

Yes—met Langny.

CLAUDINE

What did he have to say?

COUNT

Nothing; since he's stopped making love to my wife, he cuts me dead.

CLAUDINE

Really?

COUNT

Rather, since he has dropped out of the number of those who make love to my wife!

CLAUDINE

Please, Alfred, you know how I detest hearing you say such things!

COUNT

Why so? I'm not at all bitter.

CLAUDINE

Of course; you're a philosopher.

COUNT

I'm not a philosopher; only, as everyone in Paris knows of my wife's conduct, my assumed ignorance of the fact would be childish, and might even give rise to grave suspicions; to brag of it would be

odious in the extreme, but to mention it before certain picked individuals, like you, and in a light and graceful manner, that's the only decent way for a man who is well acquainted with the exigencies of life. I think there's a splendid place to fill between Georges Dandin and Othello!

CLAUDINE

You're a dilettante.

COUNT

If you like. But I have no illusions: there are certain people who were born to be deceived throughout life: I'm one of those.

CLAUDINE

You're proud of it.

COUNT

Not in the least. And don't tell me that you must be very handsome in order to have a woman remain faithful to you. I was good-looking when I was young—I can say it without boasting, because I am no longer so, but I really was a handsome young fellow.

CLAUDINE

So that even the little chimney sweeps turned round when you passed by on the street?

COUNT

No—I shouldn't have cared for that. But really, I was what is called a handsome man—and I was deceived. Nor does it help a man to be a hero. When the war broke out, I had a charming girl—I left her to serve my country. I received a bullet in the arm, a saber cut in the leg, and military honors. But while I was lying in the hospital, *she* deceived me. Then I married: I had a noble name, I was rich, I

was one of the leaders of my party. I was again deceived. I am not considered an exception: that's my consolation.

CLAUDINE

No, but you *are* an exception because of the way in which you resign yourself——

COUNT

I do what seems reasonable: infidelity, or let us say change, has become a natural law; and it is a regrettable fact that our national genius has always treated the logical working-out of that law with a ridicule which is sometimes turned into tragedy.

CLAUDINE

That is so, but what else can one do?

COUNT

Keep well in mind that the law of change should of all laws be the most inevitable—so that we might resign ourselves to it; from early youth we should be forced to meditate upon inconstancy, just as girls at the convent are forced to meditate upon death.

CLAUDINE

Rather difficult! It's not in the French temperament.

COUNT

I'm sorry!

CLAUDINE

Let's not talk about it, though. The subject is not a very pleasant one to me.

COUNT

Nothing personal, you understand?

CLAUDINE

I hope not!

COUNT

I have the greatest confidence in you—yet you are young, attractive; men make love to you. Some day, you'll cast a partial glance at one of them——

CLAUDINE

But you are already prepared!

COUNT

When I say that I have the greatest confidence in you, I mean that I believe you would never make a scandal or cause me to appear in a ridiculous light. That is as much as I have a right to ask.—What time is it?—Seven already! I must get dressed!

CLAUDINE

Dining out to-night?

COUNT

No, I have some company at my place: Humbert, the painter, who is in love with the Countess.

CLAUDINE

Humbert? Isn't he the one who is always painting those foolish, fat little women—with a good deal of underclothing exposed to the vulgar gaze?

COUNT

He's the one. The Marquis de Nezelles and I have writen a little fable about him. Here it is:

"A wondrous, magic thing is Art:
One paints a lady in scant attire,
In corset, petticoat—admire
This lucky artist who did part
From Belgium and who made his flight
Successfully o'er all the land,
And there was made by Fortune's hand
In Honor's Legion a doughty knight!

Moral:
Lucky artists never paint historical pictures."

CLAUDINE

How deliciously foolish you are!

COUNT

It's life! Out of our great sorrows we build fables to fit.—Good-by, dearest.—Hasn't Denise come in yet? Kiss her for me when she does.

CLAUDINE

I shan't forget.—When shall I see you again?

COUNT

I'm coming to lunch to-morrow—it'll put me in good humor.

CLAUDINE

Good, lunch to-morrow. I'll give you shrimps *au gratin!*

COUNT

(*At the door*) You're a saint! (*He goes out*)

CLAUDINE

(*Is pensive for a moment, then Prosper enters, carrying a letter. She reads it, then looks at the signature.*)

PROSPER

An answer is requested.

CLAUDINE

Very well—I'll call you. (*Prosper goes out*) From Vétheuil! (*Reading*) "Dear Madame, on returning to my room, I find I have two tickets for the dress rehearsal at the Opéra to-night. You said you would like to go. I enclose the tickets. If you feel as you did this afternoon, allow me the pleasure of accompanying you; tell me when to come," etc., etc. —He's losing no time! (*She considers*) No, I'll

not go! (*She goes to her desk, puts the tickets in an envelope, rings for the servant, and gives him the envelope as soon as he comes in*) There is the answer!

THUS ENDS THE FIRST ACT

SECOND ACT

Claudine Rozay's boudoir. Doors to the right and left; a large window opening over the street; a recess, beyond which a bedroom and a large bed—with the bedclothes turned down—are seen; a soft light suffuses the bedroom. At the back is the door of Denise's room.

Claudine and the Count enter from the left.

CLAUDINE

I must see Denise—I'm a little anxious about her. She had a fever this evening.

COUNT

Growing pains, doubtless—she's tired.

CLAUDINE

I hope it's nothing more. Stay there, and don't make any noise. (*She opens the door at the back and goes out, returning a few moments later*)

COUNT

Well?

CLAUDINE

She's asleep—seems all right. She holds her pillow like this—my living image, the angel!

COUNT

Your dinner was a huge success. It went off splendidly.

CLAUDINE

Didn't it? I hope the guests weren't too bored. I'm all tired out.—Do you mind if I undress?

COUNT

Not at all. I must be going.

CLAUDINE

No, no—stay—you're not in the way. Ring for Clara, will you?

COUNT

Why?

CLAUDINE

To unhook me.

COUNT

You don't need Clara—I can do that.

CLAUDINE

No, you can't.

COUNT

Let me try.

CLAUDINE

If you like—the waist first.

COUNT

(*Unhooking*) Is this the waist?

CLAUDINE

Yes—slowly now! What a hurry you're in! Now the skirt—there are three hooks at the belt.

COUNT

(*Struggling vainly*) Don't see how this is managed! It's not easy! I don't see——!

CLAUDINE

Here, come to the fireplace, you can see better there. Now, sit down, you'll find it easier.

COUNT

(*Sitting down*) Good! It's coming.

CLAUDINE

Is it all right?

COUNT

Wait: not yet.—Damned dressmakers! Don't see how you can stand being bound like that!

CLAUDINE

It's not tight at all!

COUNT

I can't understand! Whew—I give up!

CLAUDINE

I told you——! I'll call Clara now. (*She rings*)

[*Enter Clara.*

CLAUDINE

Clara, unhook my skirt.

COUNT

(*Sitting in an armchair*) What was the matter with Vétheuil this evening? He didn't seem very happy.

CLAUDINE

I didn't notice: he looked as usual.

COUNT

He was sitting with little Jamine, who seemed to think him very agreeable.

CLAUDINE

Really! (*To Clara*) Get my kimono, please.

COUNT

You heard her, didn't you? She asked him to accompany her home.

CLAUDINE

I didn't notice. (*To Clara*) Get my kimono, please.

COUNT

Charming fellow—I like him immensely.

CLAUDINE

Yes, he is nice. (*To Clara*) Get my slippers, and take off my shoes.

COUNT

What do you think of my friend Chérance?

CLAUDINE

How do you mean?

COUNT

How do I mean? He spoke with you—he talks well.

CLAUDINE

Yes, interesting—and yet rather tiresome.

COUNT

He likes to hear himself talk—but he's not at all an ordinary man. He's written a very remarkable book on the *Divine Right*.

CLAUDINE

I didn't know that—but I did notice he seemed to enjoy the dinner——

COUNT

He has a very fine brain——

CLAUDINE

Helped himself twice to ices.

COUNT

Capital ices they were! Where did they come from?

CLAUDINE

Alexandrine's, as usual.

COUNT

Curious! My wife deals there regularly, only things never taste as good as they do here. You lay a better table than she does.

CLAUDINE

Yes?

COUNT

Fact, well known all over Paris.

CLAUDINE

There are two Alexandrines—one good, one bad. Mme. Alexandrine sold out to Mme. Biard—she's at the corner of the Rue de Londres, and does business under the name of Alexandrine; but the real Alexandrine, the one who sold her business, is now at the Place du Havre—but she's a competitor: she's the imitator.

COUNT

When you're buying ices, where should you go?

CLAUDINE

To the imitator, of course. The original makes ices that smell of *pommade*.—Thank you, Clara, I shan't need you any more—you may go to bed.

[*Clara goes out.*

COUNT

I'm going to say good-by to you to-night, dear.

CLAUDINE

Good-by? Are you leaving to-morrow?

COUNT

Yes, I must go to Naples; I've just received a telegram.

CLAUDINE

Another conspiracy?

COUNT

I shall be away about a week.

CLAUDINE

You're lucky to be going to the land of sunlight and blue sky.

COUNT

I'm not lucky, for I can't take you with me!

CLAUDINE

(*Making conversation*) Ah, Italy! (*Short pause*)

COUNT

It's a long time since you allowed me in your boudoir when you were retiring.

CLAUDINE

Has it been so long?

COUNT

You don't remember—I do! (*He kisses her*)

CLAUDINE

(*Surprised*) What's this?

COUNT

I'm kissing you! May I not kiss you?

CLAUDINE

Certainly!

COUNT

You seem offended?

CLAUDINE

Not in the least! Only I was a little surprised. I wasn't expecting—you know how nervous I am! Now—you may kiss me again. (*She offers her cheek*) Be nice now, there, there!

COUNT

"There, there"—as if to say: That's enough! What perfume are you using this evening?

CLAUDINE

The usual kind.

COUNT

What?

CLAUDINE

Secret mixture—my own.

[*The clock strikes ten.*

COUNT

Is that ten?

CLAUDINE

Yes.—How sleepy I am!

COUNT

Well, I'll leave you! Good-by!

CLAUDINE

Good-by.

COUNT

(*Goes to the window*) Claudine!

CLAUDINE

Yes.

COUNT

What weather!

CLAUDINE

Snowing, isn't it?

COUNT

You're not going to send me out on a night like this!

CLAUDINE

How do you mean?

COUNT

I mean, in this awful weather?

CLAUDINE

Why, you have your carriage, dear; it's waiting for you. You have nothing to complain of. Clara has brought a heater for you. You must go, or the water in the heater will get cold. Your coachman must be freezing to death—and the horse—think of the poor horse!

COUNT

Well, I'll go. But I should like to have gone—comforted—my heart warmed up!

CLAUDINE
How?

COUNT
You know.

CLAUDINE
Would you like a glass of Cognac?

COUNT
I said, my heart!—From *you*—dear Claudine! (*He takes her in his arms*)

CLAUDINE
Stop, you're hurting me!

COUNT
(*Reproachfully*) Oh, Claudine!

CLAUDINE
You *did* hurt me!

COUNT
I'm sorry, I beg your pardon.—I'm going.

CLAUDINE
You mustn't blame me—you understand—you must be indulgent toward a hostess who has entertained fifteen people at dinner—and after. I'm all limp, nervous—Denise isn't well—and then, between old friends, dear!

COUNT
My fault, I know—I can't help if I love you, adore you—I know I'm not much like a real lover, I'm an old fellow——!

CLAUDINE
You are Denise's father!

COUNT
Yes, yes, you love your daughter now, and I have no right to be jealous. Forgive me!

CLAUDINE

My dear!

COUNT

Only, this evening, I did help you unhook, didn't I? I was—intoxicated! The most staid of men have moments when the brute is uppermost in them.

CLAUDINE

No, you weren't brutal—you're exaggerating.

COUNT

You're always a dear! Sleep well! Good night!—Am I—am I ridiculous?

CLAUDINE

(*Kissing him*) You're so good! (*After he goes out*) Poor man!

[*Claudine is alone. A carriage is heard driving off: then Claudine draws back the curtains a little, and places the lamp so that its light can be seen outside. Then, carefully, noiselessly, she opens the door whence the Count has left. Vétheuil appears.*

VÉTHEUIL

(*In a long overcoat, the fur collar of which is turned up*) What weather! Fearful, the snow!

CLAUDINE

Are you cold?

VÉTHEUIL

Frozen through. I've been waiting in the street for an hour.

CLAUDINE

(*Brusquely*) It's not my fault.

VÉTHEUIL

My dearest, I'm not blaming you—I'm only too glad to be near you now! You know very well I'd pass a

whole night like that to be with you for five minutes! (*He tries to kiss her*)

CLAUDINE

Your nose is frozen. Go to the fire and warm yourself.

VÉTHEUIL

Warm yourself, soldier, warm yourself! Ah, the warm fire! This is comfortable! You know, I saw that nice little Jamine home?

CLAUDINE

Yes, I know.

VÉTHEUIL

How is everything?

CLAUDINE

Splendid.

VÉTHEUIL

Your dinner was superb.

CLAUDINE

Ah!

VÉTHEUIL

What's the trouble?

CLAUDINE

Nothing.

VÉTHEUIL

Something's the matter?

CLAUDINE

I tell you: nothing!

VÉTHEUIL

Oh!

CLAUDINE

What have you been doing to-day?

VÉTHEUIL

Now for the little cross-examination!

CLAUDINE

Yes.

VÉTHEUIL

Well, I got up at eight: shaved, washed, combed my hair, and dressed. I wore my gray suit, Scotch tie—no, it wasn't——

CLAUDINE

Now, don't try to be funny!

VÉTHEUIL

I'm not, I merely want to be exact, as exact as possible.

CLAUDINE

It's not funny, and I'm not laughing—go on!

VÉTHEUIL

Then I went out: to Hahn Meyer's to see some old engravings he had just acquired. I picked out two for you, pretty ones, colored, with original margins. I took them to be framed. You'll have them a week from to-morrow.

CLAUDINE

Well——? Then?

VÉTHEUIL

Oh, not at all—I'm only too happy—it's really nothing!

CLAUDINE

What?

VÉTHEUIL

I thought you would at least thank me! Then I had lunch at the club.

CLAUDINE

Then?

VÉTHEUIL

Then I went to Francueil's.

CLAUDINE

Ah! Why? I told you not to go there!

VÉTHEUIL

I know, but he sent me a message this morning asking me to come.

CLAUDINE

Couldn't he see you?

VÉTHEUIL

Now, that's not fair. What have you against him?

CLAUDINE

I—I—well, I don't like him.

VÉTHEUIL

I simply had to go: I can't cut him dead, you know. He never harmed me, and he never even obliged me—if he had, then I should have the excuse of ingratitude. I might never see him again.—After all, he's a friend.

CLAUDINE

A companion in vice! And such vice! You yourself told me all about it when you were making love to me.

VÉTHEUIL

It was wrong of me. It's always wrong to tell things of that sort—later on it's used as a weapon against you——

CLAUDINE

Oh!

VÉTHEUIL

Why don't you like him?

CLAUDINE

He has no heart, no moral sense. I know he has a lot of women at his place; he knows all the evil parts

of Paris. When you visit him, you always seem to regret that you can't do as he does.

VÉTHEUIL

Nothing of the sort!

CLAUDINE

Well, I don't like it.—Why, he's never seen twice with the same woman!

VÉTHEUIL

That's not his fault! It was his dream to have and to keep one woman, but they have always either deceived or deserted him.

CLAUDINE

Hm!

VÉTHEUIL

That's what made him what he is. Well, if you object to him on the ground of his inconstancy, you may rest at peace now: he's been with the same lady for six months.

CLAUDINE

She must be having a splendid time!

VÉTHEUIL

She adores him.

CLAUDINE

He must be spending a mint of money!

VÉTHEUIL

She's not asked for a sou.

CLAUDINE

How stupid! Do such women exist? Was she there when you were?

VÉTHEUIL

I didn't see her if she was. Francueil was alone. He asked me to say good-by to him—he's leaving.

CLAUDINE

Bon voyage! He *must* love her!

VÉTHEUIL

He's mad about her.

CLAUDINE

Is he taking her with him?

VÉTHEUIL

Oh, no! To begin with, she's married, then he's going too far away. He's had a beautiful yacht built and is going on a cruise. He's just bought a *Comores* for a song.

CLAUDINE

At auction?

VÉTHEUIL

No, in the Indian Ocean. My dear little one, the Comores are islands. Seriously: they form an archipelago between the coast of Africa and Madagascar. He means to have a stopping-place, an island, in each of the oceans, forming a chain: in the Marquesas, the Cyclades, the Touamotous.

CLAUDINE

What are you talking about?

VÉTHEUIL

It's true. He goes first to Siam—extraordinary way! Think of it, he once knew an Irish girl who was one of a party of Hungarian ladies, once the mistress of an envoy of the King of Siam. That ought to interest Paul Bourget, don't you think so? From this Irish girl, through her envoy, he obtained letters of introduction to the King, who will meet him as he lands, and escort him to the palace on his elephant, with pomp and ceremony and military bands. He's lucky! What a trip!

CLAUDINE

Lucky? Think so? You may go, too, if you like!

VÉTHEUIL

That's not the question.

CLAUDINE

I'm not keeping you: you are quite free.

VÉTHEUIL

I know that.

CLAUDINE

In any event, you can't say I didn't offer you an opportunity.

VÉTHEUIL

An opportunity—bound with fetters of steel—but I am quite happy. Francueil asked me to go with him, yet you know very well I'd a thousand times rather stay with you!

CLAUDINE

You wouldn't leave Paris—anyway—— All your lady friends!

VÉTHEUIL

What do I care about them? I have you!

CLAUDINE

You seemed to care about Henriette Jamine this evening.

VÉTHEUIL

Not in the least!

CLAUDINE

What was so interesting in her conversation, then?

VÉTHEUIL

Did I even listen?—Well, she told me about her engagement at the Palais-Royal.

CLAUDINE

Is she engaged there? They must be in need of people for their curtain-raisers! But that wasn't what made you smile.

VÉTHEUIL

Did I smile?

CLAUDINE

Yes, you did.

VÉTHEUIL

Oh, she was telling me of her affair with the Prince of Styria.

CLAUDINE

Was she——? I never heard of that! Strange how every woman tells you of her amours. Why, I've known Henriette for ten years, and she never said a word about that. See, in five minutes' time she told you everything.

VÉTHEUIL

Is it my fault if women——?

CLAUDINE

Hm! You take an interest in their adventures, you invite confidences, become a confessor, a psychologist, you look deep into their eyes, read their hearts —it's a great game, Monsieur Prudence! That's what maddens me! I know I oughtn't to tell you all this—it's foolish, imprudent, but I simply can't help it—— My God, what a fool I am!

VÉTHEUIL

Listen, Claudine! My Claudine! This is unjust! Why, I come here, wait an hour in the street—it's cold, snowing—all for the inexpressible joy of seeing you for a few moments, and this is how you welcome me! It's anything but amusing to wait for *him* to

leave—leave *his* place for me! You see, I check my dignity at the door for the pleasure of proving that I love you!

CLAUDINE

You are not jealous!

VÉTHEUIL

No? Let me tell you, I *am* jealous, only I am reasonable about it. I don't blame you, make scenes—for nothing—and I'm not digging into the past. It doesn't concern me; it oughtn't to concern you!

CLAUDINE

But Henriette Jamine isn't the past—that was this evening, this very evening! I wasn't the only one who noticed it: Ruyseux noticed it, and when *he* notices——!

VÉTHEUIL

He should mind his own business.

CLAUDINE

What do you mean?

VÉTHEUIL

And you played the coquette yourself, with Chérance!

CLAUDINE

I?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes. I didn't intend to speak of it—it's absurd!—but as you began this dispute, I might as well do my share. Of course you were hostess—you could do what you liked!

CLAUDINE

I had to treat my guests decently—in my own home!

VÉTHEUIL

(*Loudly*) You can go very far with that ideal of hospitality! Of course, in your own home! There might be no limits to amiability!

CLAUDINE

(*In an undertone*) Please don't talk so loud: you'll wake my daughter. This is nonsense—vulgar nonsense. You know very well I'm not that sort of woman—— If I was a trifle coquettish it was only because you were so attentive to little Jamine. It was revenge.

VÉTHEUIL

But I hardly know her—it was nothing at all. I scarcely know the lady. At least—I saw her and I may never see her again. But Chérance——! Everyone knows he's making love to you, that he has only one end in view, it's—of course! His eyes were glued on you all evening, while Ruyseux, who was blind, didn't interfere! I wanted to shout out to him: Look! Open your eyes! You're—I don't know!

CLAUDINE

If he weren't blind, my friend, you wouldn't be here.

VÉTHEUIL

That observation, my friend, is superfluous. (*A pause, then Vétheuil says quietly*) Claudine!

CLAUDINE

Yes?

VÉTHEUIL

We are happy, both of us; at bottom we love each other.—This is love, the deepest kind of love. You know perfectly well that I adore you and that I would willingly send Henriette Jamine and all the others to the devil for your sake. We have only a

few hours together—a few minutes—and here we are arguing!

CLAUDINE

Whose fault is it?

VÉTHEUIL

Mine, without the shadow of a doubt. Only, you must be indulgent and take me as I am. Come to me; forgive me.

CLAUDINE

You always say things to wound me: you were on the point of accusing me of being Chérance's mistress.

VÉTHEUIL

No, no, no. I said he was making love to you. That's true. Forgive me.

CLAUDINE

Nonsense! He adores his wife; she's given him five children, and is now expecting a sixth.

VÉTHEUIL

What does that prove? I can't prevent men's thinking you pretty and wanting you, yet the moment you love me, I object to it. Come, Claude dear, don't sulk—you're unbearable that way. Little scenes like this are necessary—of course—they're natural. But now it's all over, eh? Kiss and make up! (*They kiss*)

CLAUDINE

Heavens, how hungry I am! Just think, I was so taken up with watching you at dinner that I scarcely touched a thing!

VÉTHEUIL

How ridiculous! I, too, was so busy watching you that I nearly starved.

CLAUDINE

(*Laughing*) What fools we are! But we can make up for it! I'm going to the kitchen and see whether anything's left.

VÉTHEUIL

Shall I come with you?

CLAUDINE

No, no—I'll be back at once. (*She disappears*)

VÉTHEUIL

(*At the door*) Bring some bread—above all, bread. [*Left alone, he clears off a little table, which he moves toward the fireplace. Then Claudine returns with provisions.*

CLAUDINE

Here's all I could find: the servants didn't touch their own dinner, but they nearly finished ours.

VÉTHEUIL

Which goes to prove that the remains of ours was better than all of theirs.

CLAUDINE

There's only cold filet and cherry preserves.

VÉTHEUIL

(*Sententiously*) There are always preserved cherries left over.

CLAUDINE

And truffles, but I think those don't agree with you.

VÉTHEUIL

They don't, but I eat them all the same: philosophically.

CLAUDINE

Why, there's no bread! This is all I could find! (*She shows a small crust*)

VÉTHEUIL

What a pity! That doesn't surprise me, either. There is never any bread left!

CLAUDINE

I didn't bring napkins or cloth; what shall we put on the table?

VÉTHEUIL

Our elbows.

CLAUDINE

Shall we?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes! Lay those things anywhere—Champagne on the mantle—I'm glad there's no tablecloth! Let's sit on the sofa,* close together.

CLAUDINE

Good!

VÉTHEUIL

How charming you are! Here, give me your glass, and the moment the cork goes "pop," you say: "Heavens, what a time I'm having with the students!" (*He starts to open the bottle*)

CLAUDINE

Don't let it pop—it'll wake baby!

VÉTHEUIL

Worry not, Queen of Mothers, I'll let it pop gently. (*He opens the bottle and pours out the wine*) Well?

CLAUDINE

Oh, yes, "Heavens, what a time I'm having with the students!" Were you hungry?

VÉTHEUIL

As a bear.

* A pun: "Sur le pouf" and "sur le pousse"—which is untranslatable.

CLAUDINE

Nice, isn't it, to be supping together here by a warm fire, with the cold wind blowing outside?—Are you cosy?

VÉTHEUIL

Divinely happy and content.

CLAUDINE

To think that there are people who sleep in the streets in this weather!

VÉTHEUIL

Yes. Not long ago, while I was waiting, I saw a poor devil of a violinist, with his box under his arm —looked like the skull of his own child. That black man in the snow was a melancholy sight!

CLAUDINE

Poor fellow! Did you give him something?

VÉTHEUIL

I didn't dare: he didn't ask.

CLAUDINE

That happens sometimes—people who don't dare: rich people who are ashamed. They haven't the right not to dare!

VÉTHEUIL

You're delightful, Claudine! You have the kindest heart, the finest feelings of any woman I ever knew.

CLAUDINE

Is that true?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes; you say things at times that bring tears to my eyes, almost.

CLAUDINE

You love me?

VÉTHEUIL

Infinitely!

CLAUDINE

I don't ask for the adverb. You love me?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes.

CLAUDINE

Now for your trouble, I have some news.

VÉTHEUIL

Quick; what?

CLAUDINE

Ruyseux is going away to-morrow, to Naples; he'll be gone for a week. If you care to, and if Denise is well enough, we'll spend two or three days in the Forest at Fontainebleau. We'll go to Gray, where we were this autumn, in Mère Piérard's charming and tidy little inn. It'll be delightful now. I've always wanted to see the Forest in mid-winter, and wake up in the morning, pull back the shutters, and see the huge black trees, and the long white roads, and the pale blue sky! To lie warm in bed, and say to yourself that just outside the window it's so cold——!

VÉTHEUIL

Excellent idea!

CLAUDINE

I'll write to an old friend of mine at Sanlis, Mme. de Liancourt and tell her I'm coming to spend a few days with her. Understand?

VÉTHEUIL

Alibi.

CLAUDINE

Yes—and I'll bring Clara along.

VÉTHEUIL

No danger?

CLAUDINE

With Clara? She's quite devoted to me; I've had her ever so long. She was with me when Denise was born; I nursed her when she was sick with typhoid fever. Clara would willingly die for me!

VÉTHEUIL

What train shall we take?

CLAUDINE

Wait, I just looked at the time-table: there's a train at 10:57, which will bring us to Gray in time for lunch.

VÉTHEUIL

That seems all right, but 10:57 *is* a little early. Will you be ready?

CLAUDINE

To go with you, I could be ready at five, if necessary. And you?

VÉTHEUIL

I have only to dress: the valise is ready.

CLAUDINE

The famous valise—pontoon-bridge soldiers! You dear bad man, I can see you perfectly the day you told me about that, in the drawing-room downstairs. It was the first time you came to the house. I'll wager you don't remember what day that was?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, I do: June seventh, a Thursday.

CLAUDINE

And to-day——?

VÉTHEUIL

September twentieth, a Friday.

CLAUDINE

June, July, August—December, January—eight months already. That's a long time, according to modern standards, for people to love.

VÉTHEUIL

And it's not over yet!

CLAUDINE

Oh, if anyone had told me that day how important a part in your life I should become, I should have been very much surprised—and yet I liked you. Now, don't assume that foolish look! You puzzled me a good deal—I was very curious about you.

VÉTHEUIL

Ah ha!

CLAUDINE

Then you tried to work on my emotions, with your beautiful voice, and those eyes——! M. Vétheuil, you're an old coquette! (*She pulls his nose*)

VÉTHEUIL

That hurts!

CLAUDINE

That hurts, Henri!—Do you love your wife?

VÉTHEUIL

More than——

CLAUDINE

Then go, and let her retire.

VÉTHEUIL

Very well.

CLAUDINE

You must go—you've got to be up early.

VÉTHEUIL

Are you going to send me away like this?

CLAUDINE

Yes: now, seriously, run away. You must.

VÉTHEUIL

I must?

CLAUDINE

Yes, I'm entirely exhausted. Be considerate: I'll be so grateful.

VÉTHEUIL

Grateful?

CLAUDINE

Yes.

VÉTHEUIL

Why?

CLAUDINE

Because Denise is not well. I'm always afraid that that's my punishment for loving you.

VÉTHEUIL

Nonsense.

CLAUDINE

You know how superstitious I am where my daughter is concerned.

VÉTHEUIL

Claudine, this is heartless! You don't know how cold it is outdoors!

CLAUDINE

You still insist?

VÉTHEUIL

(*Kissing her*) Because I love you, I adore you! I should like to have—I'd thought——

CLAUDINE

(*Disengaging herself*) Sh! Don't say that!

VÉTHEUIL

Why?

CLAUDINE

Oh, nothing. (*Resolutely*) Not this evening.

VÉTHEUIL

(*Looking at her*) Ah, I understand.

CLAUDINE

What? What do you understand?

VÉTHEUIL

I understand, and so do you.

CLAUDINE

Georges, your insinuation is hateful. He *was* here just now, but—I swear—— No! I told you some time ago what I had to tell you on that point: you ought to be reassured.

VÉTHEUIL

You all say the same thing.

CLAUDINE

Because you all ask the same thing. But I swear to you, by my little girl——! May she die if I am lying!—you see how calm I am!—Do you believe me?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, I believe you.

CLAUDINE

Don't be jealous: it's a luxury.—Poor man!

VÉTHEUIL

Do you expect me to pity him?

CLAUDINE

You might. He's not very happy with his wife—she goes about in public with other men.

VÉTHEUIL

Why doesn't he divorce her?

CLAUDINE

Because they are members of a circle where divorce is out of the question. You know, when a woman is unhappy there, her confessor advises her to have a *liaison* in preference to a divorce. What then can be done in the man's case? Why should he divorce her? If he did it for my sake, he would be badly recompensed.

VÉTHEUIL

At least, he would be deceived on one side only.

CLAUDINE

See, you are not really jealous of him?

VÉTHEUIL

At bottom, I am not.

CLAUDINE

Do you like him?

VÉTHEUIL

Very much.

CLAUDINE

He idolizes you. (*The clock strikes three*) Here we are, the two of us, at three in the morning. What if some one were to come in? Who would believe that we were two platonic lovers? No one.

VÉTHEUIL

And my recompense?

CLAUDINE

Not later than to-morrow. Now go, only I want you to say nice things to me before you leave. But you needn't if you don't wish to.

VÉTHEUIL

Claudine, you know I adore you—you're the best, prettiest——! You are mine, wholly mine—I can't think of any other woman than you! We may quar-

rel from time to time, but that is nothing—we do understand each other, don't we? Once in a while there arises a faint shadow of remorse, of pity, between us—for *him!* And when you're out of humor, you mustn't blame me! Claudine, Claudine, this is how I love you—with all my power of devotion——! (*He kneels before her*)

CLAUDINE

That's enough—now I'm happy. Run away, and don't make any noise. I'll go out onto the balcony and watch you, keep you warm as long as possible.

VÉTHEUIL

That's not wise! You'll catch cold—I don't want you to——!

CLAUDINE

Yes, I'll wrap up warmly.

VÉTHEUIL

No, no—— If you do that, I'll kill myself under your very window.

CLAUDINE

I shan't insist then. Well, to-morrow morning—10:57. Don't forget.

VÉTHEUIL

How could I?—Good night, beloved!

CLAUDINE

Good night, my lover! (*Vétheuil goes out. After a moment, Claudine extinguishes the lamp, then partially opens the door into Denise's room, to see whether the child is sleeping*)

THUS ENDS THE SECOND ACT

THIRD ACT

Vétheuil's study. There is a large table, and some bookshelves around the walls. The room is dignified and elegant as to furnishings, but not sumptuous.

Vétheuil and De Sambré are present.

VÉTHEUIL

Cigar good?

SAMBRÉ

Excellent, old man, just the kind I like—rather strong.

VÉTHEUIL

What will you drink? Forty liqueurs to choose from.

SAMBRÉ

God bless you! I'll have a Kümmel frappé. Summer is here and one must have cold drinks. Do you know how to make cocktails?

VÉTHEUIL

Why—no.

SAMBRÉ

Lord, you must learn. A friend of mine, awfully rich—likes to drink—went to America just to learn how to make cocktails: took lessons for a year from the barkeeper of the Hoffman House in New York. Then he became a barkeeper himself in New Orleans —they make the best cocktails in Louisiana, you know.

VÉTHEUIL

I didn't know, but I'm glad to hear it.

[*Enter a servant.*

SERVANT (*Handing Vétheuil a card*)

A gentleman. He would like to see Monsieur.

VÉTHEUIL

Ask him to come in. (*The servant goes out*)

[*Enter the Count de Ruyseux.*

COUNT

How are you? Hope I'm not intruding?

VÉTHEUIL

Not in the least: I'm very glad to see you. Let me present my old friend Paul de Sambré—Count de Ruyseux. (*The men bow*) Sit down.

COUNT

I shan't stay long. I just came to ask why you didn't appear yesterday?

VÉTHEUIL

Yesterday? Where?

COUNT

I thought so! You forgot you were invited to dine with Claudine and me, and that we were going to the *Folies-Bérgères* afterward to see the début of the Princess Soukhivitchi.

VÉTHEUIL

That's so! I forgot all about it. I was so busy yesterday! I've just been putting some affairs in order that I hadn't looked at for ten years. I was all topsy-turvy. Did you wait long for me?

COUNT

Naturally—you didn't let us know—I was afraid you might be ill.

VÉTHEUIL

I'm dreadfully sorry, but it quite slipped my mind. I beg your pardon a thousand times!

COUNT

That's all right. The important point is to know you're not sick.

VÉTHEUIL

Did you enjoy yourselves? How was the Princess?

COUNT

Very pretty.

VÉTHEUIL

A real princess?

COUNT

Yes—legally married to the Prince Soukhivitchi. She came of a great family herself, the La Roche-Ferrières—I used to run around there when I was a child, but I'm not at all proud!—She married this Prince Soukhivitchi, though she didn't love him. She has an aversion to men.

VÉTHEUIL

There is every variety of taste in nature.

SAMBRÉ

Rather a handicap to her!

COUNT

They separated after a year: each had been kicking over the traces. She was left without a sou, so when her family refused to give her money, she went to the *Folies-Bérgères* to spite them.

VÉTHEUIL

Must have been a packed house. They didn't whistle her off?

COUNT

No—that is to say, the fashionable part of the audience, in the boxes, gave her a warm reception and hearty applause. But the gallery seemed to understand that she was doing a low trick, and protested vigorously. Then she sang songs to calm the people, a new style all her own—"*Chansons vaches*"—I've never heard such vileness.

SAMBRÉ

They'll go the rounds of the salons.

COUNT

(*Rising*) Doubtless. Well, I must go. (*To Vétheuil, who escorts him to the door*) Come to the Place des États-Unis a little later, if you have a few minutes to spare. I don't know what's the matter with Claudine: she's moody, bored, fidgety—you seem to be the only one who can handle her. Come and see her: it'll be an errand of mercy.

VÉTHEUIL

With pleasure—I'll try to—I'm waiting for a telegram just now. I may be forced to leave town any moment: pressing affairs—family matters.

COUNT

Where are you going?

VÉTHEUIL

I don't know.

COUNT

You don't know where your family is? You are a funny fellow! Invite you to dinner and you forget to come. You *are* a character!

VÉTHEUIL

Now, now——

COUNT

Well, good-by. (*To De Sambré*) Very glad to have made your acquaintance, Monsieur. (*They shake hands. Vétheuil conducts the Count out and then reënters*)

SAMBRÉ

Was that the Count de Ruyseux?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes.

SAMBRÉ

He's the——

VÉTHEUIL

Yes.

SAMBRÉ

Nice fellow.

VÉTHEUIL

Yes.

SAMBRÉ

Very amiable; very!

VÉTHEUIL

Very! Altogether quite charming——

SAMBRÉ

Tell me, have you fallen out with *her?*

VÉTHEUIL

How do you know that?

SAMBRÉ

All Paris knows it, my dear fellow—except one!

VÉTHEUIL

All Paris had much better mind its own business. Now I understand why you came to see me: you've come to study me, to pry into my troubles. Well, I have no trouble, and I am not unhappy! I may suffer to-morrow, I may suffer within an hour, but for

the present, I am in the best of spirits. Tell that to All Paris, Doctor!

SAMBRÉ

I shan't fail to.

VÉTHEUIL

I am happy, very happy, because I'm free! That's what was weighing on me continually: I felt all the time I was a slave. How good it is to come and go when I like, to do what I like from hour to hour and minute to minute, to see my friends—in other words, to live!

SAMBRÉ

My dear fellow, that's not of prime interest to me. So much the worse for you, I say, if your mistress was so absorbing as all that.

VÉTHEUIL

You have never really loved, have you?

SAMBRÉ

I have loved but one woman, and she was a servant: when I was thirteen my mother's maid possessed for me every possible charm. Her name was Césarine—she was a blond from Bordeaux. Of course, a child of thirteen hasn't a very definite or individual character—I realize now that Césarine may not have been all I imagined her in former days.

VÉTHEUIL

Probably not.

SAMBRÉ

Since then I have had numerous affairs, but they have never been of real importance.

VÉTHEUIL

You know, I admire you.

SAMBRÉ

My dear fellow: the Orientals, understanding women perfectly, have put them in their proper place. Now we live in the Occident; we don't veil our women and put them under lock and key and a guard, but we must put them, metaphorically speaking, in the harem, and not allow them to wander about in the domain of our thoughts, nor the avenues of our heart, nor the little streets of our occupation. Understand?

VÉTHEUIL

Perfectly. But if the woman breaks out of her metaphorical harem? If she deceives you? It's inevitable!

SAMBRÉ

Every contingency has been considered. Under the conditions I have made, woman won't trouble us; that is the main point. She will find her power over us greatly reduced: when she gives herself, either to you or to your neighbor, then you can see it all in its true colors and appraise it at its real worth, and not its factitious value, which is merely the result of our prejudices, our pride, and our sentimentality.

VÉTHEUIL

But what should we gain by knowing the real worth?

SAMBRÉ

You do away with lovemaking, chivalrous nonsense, jealousy, everything that takes up good time—occasionally a whole life. A man of twenty-five, if he falls under the influence of a woman, can do nothing serious or useful in life. I don't know how old you are—thirty-four? You've wasted your time, you've lost yourself in the folds of a petticoat, in the midst

of the ocean of the world, like the diver in his glass clock, that Jean-Paul speaks of—— Well, I say there are more interesting things to do, and in any science, more infinitely fascinating problems to solve.

VÉTHEUIL

You're mistaken: love is itself an art and a science.

SAMBRÉ

Nonsense! Hasn't it always been the same? Every love affair ends the same way: it's very faulty mathematics that tries to resolve it into rules of three.

VÉTHEUIL

That's all very well, but you forget that certain people are born lovers, just as poets or musicians are born——

SAMBRÉ

Or butchers! We must learn to scorn love.

VÉTHEUIL

Trot along with your scorn.—You pretend love is powerless because *you* cannot be loved. What right have you to talk of love, you who never got beyond your mother's maid? I was not in the least surprised to hear you say that "every contingency had been considered." I tell you there are women with whom these contingencies are of singular importance; and when they give themselves, body and soul, I—I find the gift worth the trouble!

SAMBRÉ

You *are* excited about it!

VÉTHEUIL

Not at all—only there are certain sensations, emotions——

SAMBRÉ

(*Ironically*) Intoxications!

VÉTHEUIL

Yes—intoxications, which you have never dreamed of!

SAMBRÉ

Ah, yes! (*Declaiming*) "Eternal angel of happy nights, thou who will tell of thy silence! Oh, kiss, mysterious union, poured by the lips as from cups! Intoxication of the senses, oh divine sweetness! Yes, like God, thou art immortal!" *

VÉTHEUIL

It's easy to jeer—and further, that's only literature you quote now! But there are certain memories not to be recalled by words: landscapes of happiness seen again only in the inner silence of the heart—tender backgrounds with wide-sweeping, calm, wave-like lines. A melody once heard, a perfume breathed—and you live again in all their intensity the hours of yesteryear, you live with the soul you had then. Then life becomes worth living. Why, I remember—no, you wouldn't understand——

SAMBRÉ

Never mind.

VÉTHEUIL

I feel sorry for you.

SAMBRÉ

I feel sorry for you: you love her still—and you will suffer again.

VÉTHEUIL

No—I'm going away to-night, so——

[*Enter a servant.*

SERVANT

A lady, who would like to speak with Monsieur——

* Alfred de Musset, *La Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle.*

VÉTHEUIL

Tell her to come in. (*The servant goes out*)

SAMBRÉ

I'll run, old man. You say you're leaving to-night; but I know it's not *adieu*, only *au revoir*. I'll come in to see you to-morrow about this time——

VÉTHEUIL

No use!

[*De Sambré, as he is leaving, finds himself face to face with Henriette Jamine. He stands to one side and allows her to pass. Enter Mme. Jamine, as De Sambré goes out.*

VÉTHEUIL

How are you, friend?

MADAME JAMINE

How are you, monster? You are a pretty one!—It's nice here.

VÉTHEUIL

That's so: you've never seen my rooms. Now, to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?

MADAME JAMINE

Can't you guess?

VÉTHEUIL

No.

MADAME JAMINE

I've seen Claudine.

VÉTHEUIL

Ah!

MADAME JAMINE

She's very sad.

VÉTHEUIL

I'm not gay myself, but whose fault is it? Not mine, surely?

MADAME JAMINE

You've not been over-nice to her.

VÉTHEUIL

Did she say I beat her?

MADAME JAMINE

No, but you make her very miserable.

VÉTHEUIL

She is doing that. Well, what does she have to say?

MADAME JAMINE

That there was an awful scene; she said you left in a mad fury, and hadn't been to see her for two days.

VÉTHEUIL

It was fearful, and so downright stupid!

MADAME JAMINE

What was the reason?

VÉTHEUIL

You'd never guess—in a thousand guesses: about a horseback ride.

MADAME JAMINE

What, she's not jealous of your horse?

VÉTHEUIL

No, but when I go to the Bois, she has forbidden me to go through certain lanes; she's afraid I might meet some of my lady friends.

MADAME JAMINE

Is *she* as jealous as all that?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes—it's perfectly absurd. Well, the day before yesterday, in the morning, I disobeyed orders—I was seen in the *Acacias*—one of the forbidden drives——

MADAME JAMINE

Acacias! I should think so!

VÉTHEUIL

In the afternoon I visit Claudine, am received as if I'd committed a crime against love—I don't know, it's as if I'd made love to Clara, after forcing her to give up her religion.

MADAME JAMINE

Not as bad as all that!

VÉTHEUIL

Ah yes! That's the way it began—it was childish.

MADAME JAMINE

She loves you; she's like every woman who is really in love: jealous and domineering.

VÉTHEUIL

But there are limits!

MADAME JAMINE

If you'd only seen me and Philippe—I adored that boy!—I would never let him go unaccompanied to a restaurant, to the theater, or the races! I made him fall out with all his friends, and made any number of scenes. I made life miserable for him. He was the only man I ever really loved. We women are always like that when we truly love.

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, it's a sort of revenge.

MADAME JAMINE

And the arguments and quarrels—! I remember, one day he was teasing me about a woman—he was in the bath tub. I hit him over the shoulder with a riding whip.

VÉTHEUIL

Really? What did he say?

MADAME JAMINE

He turned white as a sheet—I thought he was going to kill me—then he said: "Get out!"

VÉTHEUIL

And you escaped?

MADAME JAMINE

In a jiffy. I wasn't really in earnest, though.

VÉTHEUIL

Then what happened?

MADAME JAMINE

(*Simply*) Reconciliation—that's love!

VÉTHEUIL

Yes—there are people who like to be beaten—but I'm not one of them. Thank God, our love was not of the riding-whip variety, but it gave signals of distress, as it were.

MADAME JAMINE

So soon! How long have you known each other?

VÉTHEUIL

It will soon be a year.

MADAME JAMINE

A year? It can't end like that!

VÉTHEUIL

Yes. There's no other way out. There must at least be some sort of change.

MADAME JAMINE

You ought to be indulgent: you know her so well! You are stronger than she is—be kind to her—try to——

VÉTHEUIL

I have, but for some time these scenes have been of almost daily occurrence. The slightest thing, or nothing, will precipitate one. She's so jealous!

MADAME JAMINE

Of what? Of whom? There are no grounds, are there?

VÉTHEUIL

Of course not; that's why it's all so absurd. She's jealous of everything—of you! Why, one night she gave me a severe talking to because she thought I was paying too much attention to you!

MADAME JAMINE

(*With dignity*) That was wrong of her. When a man is already disposed of, I wouldn't for a moment consider—! He's sacred. I've often said to myself: Claudine is not careful enough, she's too domineering, she'll have an awful bump some day.

VÉTHEUIL

Like a cable that's too tight. There are times when you can see it's going to break: in technical language, the cable is warning. Well, what happened yesterday was one of those warnings. (*A pause*) Did she send you?

MADAME JAMINE

Yes, but she told me not to say so. She loves you, she adores you; she's sick—suffering. Don't be hard with her.

VÉTHEUIL

I'm not.

MADAME JAMINE

You'll not soon again find another woman like her—so good, so intelligent!

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, I know.

MADAME JAMINE

You were to have dined with her and Ruyseux last night—it seems you didn't go?

VÉTHEUIL

I forgot all about it—word of honor! Otherwise I should have sent word, without fail!

MADAME JAMINE

She thought it was done purposely, especially as she knew you dined with Ravier and his crowd.

VÉTHEUIL

Yes?

MADAME JAMINE

There were some ladies of accommodating virtue there; she imagined you might have been with one of those.

VÉTHEUIL

Good Lord, no! You can assure her! What could lead me to do that?

MADAME JAMINE

To forget, to drown your sorrows!

VÉTHEUIL

No, no—the chase Claudine has been leading me for some time has made me forget myself. I'm completely changed. What I want now is peace, rest. I'm leaving to-night; going to bury myself in Brittany, by the seashore, all alone.

MADAME JAMINE

You're going away? But I can't tell her that!

VÉTHEUIL

You don't have to—but I'm not going away forever—this is not flight.

MADAME JAMINE

Are you going without seeing her, or saying good-by?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, I mustn't see her at this time. I must collect myself, see clearly—alone.

MADAME JAMINE

You can't do that—it would cause her a great deal of pain.

VÉTHEUIL

I'll write; she'll have a letter this very evening—full of tenderness—and I'll explain it all much better than you could. You needn't say a word to her. Promise you won't say anything!

MADAME JAMINE

I promise.

VÉTHEUIL

Now I want you to be with her when she gets this letter—I'll manage to have it arrive at seven—in order that you may tell her in what frame of mind you found me, and that I adore her.—Only, I tell you I must have a change—this couldn't last—I must take a decisive step.

MADAME JAMINE

That's clear enough, but what shall I tell her now? She's waiting for me.

VÉTHEUIL

Tell her I wasn't at home.

MADAME JAMINE

That's good; well, I'll run along. Write her a nice letter. Good-by.

VÉTHEUIL

Good-by—thanks for coming. You are a true friend.

MADAME JAMINE

I love you both. Good-by, *bon voyage*, and come back soon. (*She goes out, Vétheuil rings*)

[*Enter the Servant.*

SERVANT

Monsieur?

VÉTHEUIL

Pack up—I'm going away immediately.

SERVANT

Will Monsieur be gone long?

VÉTHEUIL

No: a week or two at the outside. I'll take only my valise, the yellow one. Put it on the sofa, together with the traveling rug, so that I only have to take them and go.

SERVANT

At once?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, at once. (*Vétheuil performs the pantomime of a man considering the composition of a difficult letter. Meantime the servant has brought the valise and traveling rug, and placed them on the sofa. Then, while Vétheuil is writing his letter, the door quietly opens, and*

[*Enter Claudine.*

VÉTHEUIL

(*Hearing the door open, he lifts his head. Then he rises*) You!

CLAUDINE

Yes, I. (*She sits down. A pause. She coughs*) How smoky!

VÉTHEUIL

Shall I open the window?

CLAUDINE

Never mind—you weren't expecting me?

VÉTHEUIL

No.

CLAUDINE

See, I'm not proud: I come to you, as you don't come to me. Only—Jamine has just come from my house—or—why lie about it? I was waiting for her in my carriage outside. She told me you were going away. Is that true?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes.

CLAUDINE

So, if I hadn't come, you would have gone without saying good-by? What have I done? Men leave women who have made them suffer, who have deceived them, who are exercising an evil influence over them. You have nothing to complain of.

VÉTHEUIL

I should have been gone only a few days. Then—I was just writing to you.

CLAUDINE

Why write? So that what you had to say would be more definite, irreparable—? Now you may say what you had to say; I'll listen. I shan't make a scene—you seem to imagine that's my specialty, that I make your life miserable.

VÉTHEUIL

A corrupted version must have reached you: if I determined to write instead of seeing you, it was simply because I was afraid, not of you, but of myself.

CLAUDINE

You were afraid of being weak—you might pity me! But I have no need of pity. Now you are perfectly free to tell me everything.

VÉTHEUIL

Very well, let us have a frank explanation. Listen, Claudine. I love you. (*Gesture from Claudine*) Don't doubt it. I love you—and for that very reason, the life I'm living now is no longer endurable. I love you so deeply that I can't bear the thought of sharing you with anyone else. You must be all mine, just as I am all yours.

CLAUDINE

But am I not?

VÉTHEUIL

No—things exist between us—you know. It's very irksome, for instance, to wait at night, until *he*, your—until he goes!

CLAUDINE

Is that all you object to? You haven't had to wait often. He is a friend: you knew that when we first met—I didn't lie about it.

VÉTHEUIL

Doubtless, but we're continually going round and round. At first, I didn't fully realize, I didn't know him then. Now I take his hand in mine every day—I've learned to appreciate him, respect him! He

has such confidence in me! I feel it's not right to lie to him, deceive him.

CLAUDINE

But what about me? You can't be more of a Royalist than the king?

VÉTHEUIL

That may be, but our love must not be founded on lies. There must be nothing between us: you must choose.

CLAUDINE

How can I?

VÉTHEUIL

That was what I was going to suggest. I want you to be with me.

CLAUDINE

Where?

VÉTHEUIL

No matter—in my house—anywhere—it makes no difference.

CLAUDINE

You want me to leave Ruyseux?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes.

CLAUDINE

No: I have no right. You're asking me to leave a man who has never been anything but kind to me, a man I never had reason to complain of. It would be a terrible blow for him. It would be base—I can't do that. No, I can't.

VÉTHEUIL

Then you don't love me?

CLAUDINE

Don't be foolish: I love you, and I won't let you doubt it for a second. You know that only too well. Listen to me: if you happened to be obliged to fight a duel for a point of honor to-morrow, you would fight in spite of my prayers and deepest wishes—I might—die of it. That's the way with women: there are certain circumstances under which we ought not to give in, even hesitate. We don't fight duels, we make sacrifices. That is why I cannot do what you ask me. Just consider: he adores me, he loves his daughter—can we both leave him? What would the poor man do? It would be cowardly—and you cannot ask me to do a cowardly act.

VÉTHEUIL

How you love him! And yet you are unfaithful to him.

CLAUDINE

He doesn't know—and he doesn't suffer—isn't that the main point? Then there is—my little girl.

VÉTHEUIL

Yes—Denise—I——

CLAUDINE

(*Putting her hand over his mouth*) Sh! Yes, my little girl: I must think of her future: if I went off with you, if there were to be a scandal in my life, some day, when it was time she married, it might be said to her, "Birds of a feather——"

VÉTHEUIL

But—now—her father isn't your husband!

CLAUDINE

Yes, but there is just as much hypocrisy needed in the circle where I live, as in the *real* one—the *other*,

if you like! Then there are material considerations which we must keep in mind. If I went off with you, would her father continue to look after her? He is a man of honor—that's undeniable—but there *is* a limit! Then I don't want Denise to have to go through what I did, all alone—I know too well what it cost me: the suffering, the dangers. And nowadays, more than ever, young girls must have dowries.

VÉTHEUIL

What can I say? Of course those are all splendid reasons. What you say makes me think, deeply. And yet, if you really loved me——

CLAUDINE

Yes, I know what you are going to say: passion is its own excuse—but that applies only to brutes. You might cite cases where women have given up all for their lovers. We know of them, yes! but we don't hear of the others, whose hearts have been broken, who did their duty, and said nothing.

VÉTHEUIL

According to that, then, your first duty was not to have become my mistress.

CLAUDINE

Our duty is not to injure those who have been kind to us.

VÉTHEUIL

But I have given up everything for you! The day I first knew you, I gave up my freedom: I settled within a stone's throw of you. I have completely rearranged my mode of living, given up my friends, without a thought for myself!

CLAUDINE

I appreciate it, but you see you were sacrificing yourself, not others. Oh, if I were alone, do you think I should care for comforts and luxury and money? You know very well I should go with you wherever you liked, live on two hundred francs a month in the country, so that I might be with you alone—body and soul—because I love you!

VÉTHEUIL

Is that true?

CLAUDINE

Oh, yes! But to do that now would be cowardice—it's out of the question. If this life is no longer possible, if I make you unhappy, then you are right to leave, at once, and forget me. When you return we can be friends—if I am still here.

VÉTHEUIL

No, Claudine, I cannot forget you, and as for being friends, that's not reasonable. Yes, just now I wanted to go away. I was quite determined before I saw you, but the moment you entered the room, I knew I could never go. I had made up my mind in advance—but you know I can't exist without you—your voice, your presence, your caresses—your head on my shoulder—I must adore you, and keep telling you how I adore you. Everything else, if need be, may remain as before, we can continue without wronging anyone—we must plan it out, that's all. If we are aware of the danger, we have only to avoid it. You will be a little less domineering, jealous, and I more patient and forgiving. You won't be as you were the day before yesterday—!

CLAUDINE

You *were* cruel! Think of not coming to see me all day!

VÉTHEUIL

This explanation was bound to come—now it's over. Let's forget it—we love, don't we?

CLAUDINE

Yes!

VÉTHEUIL

That's the important point.

CLAUDINE

Then you're not so much to be pitied?

VÉTHEUIL

No.

CLAUDINE

We have spent some wonderful hours together, haven't we?

VÉTHEUIL

We have!

CLAUDINE

Kiss me.

VÉTHEUIL

Claudine! Let me look at you.

CLAUDINE

No, no, it's too light in here! I've been crying! I'm not at all pretty! (*She goes to the window, closes the curtains, fastening them together with one of her hat-pins. Then she comes back and sits down*) Now, it's more mysterious, and you can't see my red eyes. Come here, close to me, as we used to sit, dear. Remember, you were at my feet, your head on my knees, while we watched the night falling—we were the spirits of twilight and silence.

VÉTHEUIL

I adore you, Claudine! I adore you!

CLAUDINE

Wait, what am I sitting on?

VÉTHEUIL

Oh, let me take it away.

CLAUDINE

What is it?

VÉTHEUIL

My valise!

[*He takes the valise which the servant had placed on the sofa, lays it on the floor, and returns to Claudine. They embrace.*

THUS ENDS THE THIRD ACT

ACT FOUR

Pallanza, on the shores of Lago Maggiore: a garden full of magnolias, on a terrace from which the lake and mountains can be seen through a crystal blue atmosphere—all under a sky illuminated by moon and stars. Claudine is in déshabille, Vétheuil in traveling clothes.

CLAUDINE

What time did you tell them to call for you?

VÉTHEUIL

Ten.

CLAUDINE

So soon!

VÉTHEUIL

I must be at the Locarno station for the eleven o'clock train.

CLAUDINE

And your baggage?

VÉTHEUIL

The coachman will call at the hotel first.

CLAUDINE

Will the carriage come to get you up there at the house?

VÉTHEUIL

No, I told the coachman to come here, to the garden.

CLAUDINE

My God! (*A pause. Then a fisherman on the lake is heard singing "Vorrei Morire!"*)

VÉTHEUIL

Listen! Our fisherman! (*Trying to smile*) He knows you're here, he's singing to you!

CLAUDINE

Yes, to me—I, too, should like to die on a night like this. Oh, when I think of to-morrow, and you away, I'll go mad. It's terrible! Why are you going so far away that I can't even write to you? Why did you accept that position to explore a land from which men never come back?

VÉTHEUIL

They return, but not very soon. That is just what I need! What both of us wished for! We have decided, haven't we, that we ought to separate? Haven't we?

CLAUDINE

Yes, only when we decided that, I was brave! To-night you are leaving, and I've—lost courage.

VÉTHEUIL

My dearest, I must go. You have no idea how hard it is to have to!

CLAUDINE

Can't you stay to-night, only to-night? Please, please—!

VÉTHEUIL

You know, dear, I have stayed as long as I could. I'm taking the last train as it is; I shall get to Marseilles just in time to catch the steamer. So you see—?

CLAUDINE

No, I can't stand it! You mustn't go!

VÉTHEUIL

Now, now, Claudine, don't say that, don't make it harder! If I did stay, could we go on living as we have in Paris? With the same obstacles to overcome, the same scenes, wearing us out? They'd begin again to-morrow, we know that only too well. They are the result of the circumstances under which we exist, under which we first met. How often have we tried to be happy in spite of everything! We were never able—we never could be able, we should end by detesting each other, deceiving each other——

CLAUDINE

No, no, no!

VÉTHEUIL

Is that sort of life possible? No, it would be a hell, it would be degrading, after these weeks we've spent together here, so—alone! We have been so happy that it's impossible to be happier; we've had a month of happiness which nothing can efface——

CLAUDINE

Except the thought of having to separate——

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, but that thought merely puts a check on our spirits, prevents our happiness from becoming insolent, gives it a tinge of melancholy, like the mist enshrouding the mountains in the evening, making their outlines less rugged, turning their enormous masses into something infinitely tender.

CLAUDINE

How you analyze sensations—how complex you are—at a moment like this! It's funny!

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, that's why I understood you, the day you told me you couldn't leave your friend or jeopardize your daughter's future. If you hadn't told me that, I should have said: Let the heavens themselves fall upon us, as they have upon so many others! Well, we have at least belonged entirely to each other this past month, without the shadow of an intruder—alone here by this lake which harbors so many loves like ours. We have been able even to cherish the illusion that we were free; we have been lovers, because we willed it. One month of pure happiness! We have had it, and now we must pay for it.

CLAUDINE

Then it's over—over?

VÉTHEUIL

Claudine, come here, let me tell you——

CLAUDINE

What? What do you want? Something reasonable again? Don't you *feel?*

VÉTHEUIL

Claudine, that's not kind! If you only knew how broken-hearted I am. I, too, have a Calvary to mount—only—it must—it must be!

CLAUDINE

Then I'll never see you again?

VÉTHEUIL

Of course you will—only, later, when we're cured.

CLAUDINE

Do you think—?

VÉTHEUIL

(*Forcefully*) Yes, we will be cured. We are now separating not because I have deceived you or you

me, or because we are tired of each other; there exist none of the usual deceits or lies between us which commonly make love a bitter thing and wound it: we are separating because there are your friend and your little girl between us, because we cannot be happy with those dear ones between us. We are saying *Adieu*, but in what a marvelously beautiful land!

CLAUDINE

You say that as if to a woman who was going to drown herself in a beautiful river!

VÉTHEUIL

You don't understand—in a peaceful land, then. Later, not to-morrow of course, but later, when you think of this terrace at Pallanza, you will see again the mountains and the lake, all these beautiful surroundings, and when your mind turns to our separation, your sadness will, in spite of yourself, become a part of the peace and quiet.

CLAUDINE

No! Don't imagine that! It's nice of you to say it, but I'm positive I shall suffer for a long time, suffer cruelly—always! I detest this country, I hate it—I'm going away at once! To-morrow morning! Oh, if I could only go off somewhere alone, and suffer by myself—! But I am expected home—I've had my vacation—charming!

VÉTHEUIL

Now, Claudine!

CLAUDINE

I'm—too unhappy! You are going to travel and see new countries; you'll be interested, distracted, you're starting a new life! You'll forget me!

VÉTHEUIL

No—never!

CLAUDINE

Listen to me; I want you to promise one thing; don't think me absurd——

VÉTHEUIL

Why should I?

CLAUDINE

You'll think it's foolish?

VÉTHEUIL

Not in the least.

CLAUDINE

Here it is, then: it's very serious. I want you, every evening at the same hour, to look at the same star that I do—I can't write, you know. So every night at ten, we'll look at—oh, wait a moment!—the Great Bear; yes, the Great Bear, that's the only thing I can recognize. I never could distinguish the others.

VÉTHEUIL

I promise.

CLAUDINE

And when you are in that awful country, I'll think of you gazing at the same corner of the sky and at the same time as I. It's not much to ask—just that!

VÉTHEUIL

But when I'm in that awful country as you call it, it will be day for me when it's night for you—we can't see the same stars.

CLAUDINE

Why?

VÉTHEUIL

Because it's impossible to see the same section of the sky from every point of the earth's surface. Now,

the earth, you understand—it would take too long to explain——

CLAUDINE

Are you sure? Couldn't we have only this one consolation? It doesn't seem right—! How alone I'll be! You ought not to have told me!

VÉTHEUIL

I should have let you believe——

CLAUDINE

Sh! (*The tinkle of bells is heard in the distance*)

VÉTHEUIL

The carriage is coming.

CLAUDINE

Already!—Oh—God!

COACHMAN

(*Speaking in an Italian dialect*) Excellency, it's ten o'clock. The Excellency's baggage is here—carriage is below.

CLAUDINE

Tell him to wait five minutes!

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, yes—I'll come in five minutes——

[*The coachman disappears. Claudine and Vétheuil sit in silence for a few moments.*

VÉTHEUIL

It's got to be!

CLAUDINE

Stop, listen—I can't—you mustn't go! Please! Please! I'll do what you say, I'll leave everyone! If I give him up would you stay?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes—but will you give him up?

CLAUDINE

If you ask me to!

VÉTHEUIL

You will? Are you sure? Do you realize what you're doing? He is your daughter's father, you'll break his heart, you in whom he has such blind faith! I must tell you these things, because if you decide, it must be for always. You can't retrace your steps —I shan't let you.

CLAUDINE

I should see him and confess; he is good, he would forgive me—he might even understand. Shall I tell him we love and that we must not be separated?

VÉTHEUIL

See? You can't.—Go to him? What an idea! There's not a man living who *would* understand these things! No, I must go.

COACHMAN

(*Appearing again*) Excellency, it's ten-fifteen, we've just got time to catch the eleven o'clock at Locarno. Got steep grades to climb.

VÉTHEUIL

(*To the coachman*) Good! I'm coming directly.

CLAUDINE

What does he say?

VÉTHEUIL

That it's ten-fifteen, and I barely have time to catch the eleven o'clock train at Locarno.

CLAUDINE

Well—good-by! (*They kiss, and cling for a time to each other*) Let me look at you, Georges! It is as if you were dying. Go, go! Don't say anything.

[*She falls on a bench, her head in her hands, and sobs. Vétheuil leaves. The bells of the carriage tinkle more and more faintly, and then are no longer heard.*

AND THUS ENDS THE FOURTH ACT

FIFTH ACT

The large drawing-room in Claudine's former home, which now belongs to Henriette Jamine.

To-night is Henriette's house-warming; lights, flowers, gypsies, and small supper tables fill the room. At each table three or four guests are seated.

As the curtain rises all the guests are silently listening to Boldi, the leader of the gypsy orchestra, as he plays to Henriette.

MADAME SORBIER

(*As soon as Boldi has ended*) Schlinder, please tell Boldi to come here; I want to hear that lovely piece again that we heard so often this Fall at Vienna—remember?

SCHLINDER

Of course, dear. (*Calling*) Boldi! Will you come here a moment and play Madame that love song—? [*Boldi comes to the table where Schlinder is seated and plays the requested number to Madame Sorbier. As he ends:*

PRUNIER

Rather melancholy, don't you think?

MADAME JAMINE

No, I think it's very pretty.

PRUNIER

Quite sad, and I don't like sad music.

MADAME JAMINE

You'd like "Allume! Allume!" all the time, wouldn't you?

PRUNIER

There's a fine dancing rhythm to that, at least!

RAVIER

Galloping, even.

MADAME JAMINE

Well, I love melancholy music, the kind that makes you dreamy. There are certain tunes I'd like played to me—when some one's whispering sweet things!

PRUNIER

Why do you look at Ravier when you say that?

RAVIER

Don't take offense, Prunier, and don't spoil a delightful *soirée!*

PRUNIER

You're enough to try the patience of a saint with all your nonsense! As if music had anything to do with those things!

MADAME JAMINE

I'm sure Ravier understands what I mean.

RAVIER

Quite right, Madame: what a sweet confidential friend music is! You know, Massenet has just written music to a poem of Verlaine's. The song was so soul-stirring that it's been censored: now we have only the words.

PRUNIER

Nonsense!

RAVIER

Fact!

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

(*At another table*) What are we waiting for?

SAMBRÉ

Something—important.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

A pause of embarrassment——

SAMBRÉ

After sparkling dialogue and merry laughter there follows painful silence!

MADAME SORBIER

Who will propose a toast to our charming hostess?

SCHLINDER

According to the old French family custom.

MADAME SORBIER

That's Ravier's business!

SCHLINDER

Now listen to him say that it comes as a complete surprise! All evening he's been preoccupied like a man repeating an improvised speech by heart!

MADAME SORBIER

What did I tell you? There he is getting up!

RAVIER

(*Standing on a chair*) Mesdames—Messieurs: it is without the slightest emotion that I take the floor——

SAMBRÉ

So you say!

RAVIER

I assure you I am not the least bit nervous.

SCHLINDER

Liar!

RAVIER

What do I risk? I am positive that whatever I may say you will all howl at me—so what would be the use in troubling my gray matter in order to search out new formulas? I therefore propose that we drink to the health of our hosts: first to Madame Henriette Jamine, our entrancing Amphitryon, whose beauty it would be superfluous to dilate upon, and also to the health of Ernest Prunier (*ironically*), the greatest cement dealer I have the pleasure of knowing.

ALL

Bravo! Bravo!

RAVIER

Gentlemen, does not this couple offer us an admirable object lesson? To such a union, to so busy an existence, to such industrious and unceasing pursuits (*turning to Henriette*) allow me, Madame, to drink, and (*turning to Prunier*) Monsieur, to Commerce and Industry!

ALL

Bravo! Bravo!

[*The conversation becomes general. While the tables are being taken out, the guests form into little groups. In one corner of the room stand Claudine and Ruyseux.*

RUYSEUX

Well, dear, what have you to say to all this?

CLAUDINE

It's been so long since I've seen anything of the sort that I'm a little bewildered. These people all seem a trifle mad. Their gayety isn't at all amusing. I suppose they don't find me very amusing, either?

RUYSEUX

You know very well you are the prettiest woman here!

CLAUDINE

Oh, oh!

RUYSEUX

And the most loved.

CLAUDINE

I believe that.

RUYSEUX

Well? We're no longer in "society"—we're not Parisians.

CLAUDINE

Thank God!

MADAME JAMINE

(*In another corner, with Ravier, Madame Grégeois, etc.*) Very charming little toast that was!

PRUNIER

I was really touched.

RAVIER

What I said was no more than the truth.

MADAME SORBIER

No indeed!—Lovely supper—we had a superb evening. You've arranged this place very tastefully—Yes, charming house-warming.

MADAME JAMINE

This is only a beginning: I'm going to have any number of parties this winter.

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

It'll be gayer than it was with the former tenant.

MADAME JAMINE

Yes—*I* don't intend to live alone and have no company, the way Claudine Rozay did. I'll have big dinners, masked suppers——

RAVIER

Costumes with tails to them!

MADAME JAMINE

You silly! It'll be too gay for anything, won't it, Ernest?

PRUNIER

Yes, and we must have those little English girls, the Llewellyn sisters.

MADAME JAMINE

No, no, not the Llewellyn sisters. They monopolize all the men—and I don't think their influence over you is good. They make you sick!—And then we must present little comedies, too.

RAVIER

Do you know what you ought to do? Have a *Revue.*

MADAME JAMINE

Who will run it?

RAVIER

I.

MADAME JAMINE

Who will act in it?

ALL

We.

RAVIER

Would you consent to take part?

MADAME GRÉGEOIS

Consent? We would intrigue each other to death to get the best rôles!

MADAME JAMINE

I have some actor friends: Raymonde Percy, who played in *The Seven of Spades*——

MADAME SORBIER

What did she do in *The Seven of Spades?*

MADAME JAMINE

Ruined it!

SAMBRÉ

We should certainly have this *Revue.*

MADAME SORBIER

What shall I be?

RAVIER

Exposition of 1900, and you, Madame Grégeois, will be the Godmother——

MADAME JAMINE

Now that everything is decided, we can dance.

[*The gypsies play; couples begin to whirl about.*

RAVIER

(*To Henriette*) I adore you!

MADAME JAMINE

Shh! Tell me that to-morrow.—Come at five!

RAVIER

Here?

MADAME JAMINE

Yes, here.

RAVIER

Our own house-warming?

MADAME JAMINE

Yes.

RAVIER

Nice?

MADAME JAMINE

Not bad!

[*Enter Gauderic.*

GAUDERIC

I beg your pardon, Madame, but I must go. Before I leave, however, I should like to have a few details for my article—that is, if you would care to have me mention your *soirée.*

MADAME JAMINE

By all means, Monsieur, but I really don't know what to say. Here is Monsieur Ravier, he can tell you everything much better than I could: he's used to it! Aren't you, Ravier?

RAVIER

I am.

MADAME JAMINE

Let me introduce you: Monsieur Ravier, Monsieur Gauderic.

RAVIER

Charmed.

GAUDERIC

Doubtless you don't know me under my own name: in *Le Trivelin* I write as *Feu Follet.*

RAVIER

Oh, I know *Feu Follet.*

MADAME JAMINE

What does it mean?

GAUDERIC

It means *Will-o'-the-Wisp.*

MADAME JAMINE

(*Looking at him and laughing, for Gauderic is homely and ordinary looking*) Ha! Ha! *Will-o'-the Wisp!*

RAVIER

Monsieur, if I can be of any assistance—?

GAUDERIC

You know, Monsieur, what I would like. Usually the host sends a note telling of the *soirée.* The editor inserts it, sometimes *gratis,* sometimes not; it is ordinarily very insipid and formal—the literature of society. But on *Le Trivelin* we go about it far differently: I like to write the articles myself, live in the atmosphere for a few moments, in order to seize the floating *nuances,* the—personal, subtle air of the occasion. I do not recoil even before the indiscreet. Now you belong to the house here, do you not?

RAVIER

I'll tell you what to say: that Madame Henriette Jamine gave a delightful house-warming in her charmingly arranged little apartment, which Monsieur Ernest Prunier has just given her.

GAUDERIC

Ah, Prunier bought the apartment! Prunier, the cement manufacturer?

RAVIER

Yes: little presents cement their friendship. There's a clever line for your article.

GAUDERIC

Didn't this place belong formerly to Claudine Rozay?

RAVIER

Yes.

GAUDERIC

Why did she sell it? Hard pressed? Financial embarrassments?

RAVIER

Oh, no, she sold it because she didn't want it any longer: she decided to live in the country.

GAUDERIC

Any celebrities here? Could you give me some names?

RAVIER

Of what sort?

GAUDERIC

Any sort—makes no difference.

RAVIER

But you said celebrities. I mean what rank, what walks of life?

GAUDERIC

Politics, finance, art.

RAVIER

Well, there's Schlinder. (*Gauderic writes on his cuff*) Ah, you write on your cuff—like Monsieur de Buffon!

GAUDERIC

Yes: documentary cuffs.

RAVIER

Schlinder, Prefect of Police—retired two years ago; Count de Ruyseux, president of the Royalist committees; Vétheuil, just returned from Indo-China, where he was a member of the Renaud Expedition—then some other gentlemen of minor importance.

GAUDERIC

And the ladies? Can you give me some names?

RAVIER

The ladies are in mortal terror of publicity; they don't like to see their names in newspapers——

GAUDERIC

But they——

RAVIER

They are ladies of a very particular species—hm!—who are supported—and whose children are as well brought up as those of the most correct families. They make use of every charm known to femininity to prevent their being spoken of. There lies the difference between them and women of the streets.

GAUDERIC

And duchesses!—I asked that because a little advertisement can do no harm.

RAVIER

Absurd! You and I know very well—no one is ever deceived. When the paper speaks of the beautiful Madame Fromage, who sang the *Jewel Song* from *Faust* like an angel, and Monsieur Le Pinson, who acted most successfully in his own peculiar style—!

GAUDERIC

Yes, we make a living off their snobbishness.

RAVIER

It's too absurd!

GAUDERIC

Many thanks, Monsieur, for your kindness.

RAVIER

Not at all, I'm only too happy to be able to help you.—Oh, by the way, you won't forget me in the little article, will you? Here's my card—I managed that last *Revue* at the club——

[*They go out. Enter Claudine and Vétheuil.*

CLAUDINE

We shan't be disturbed here.—So, you've come back to Paris at last?

VÉTHEUIL

Only last week.

CLAUDINE

And you've been away eighteen months! Were you traveling all the time?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, I helped explore marvelous and terrible lands. I was burned by the sun, frozen by the cold, nearly died of hunger and thirst, and made my way over twelve hundred leagues of desert.

CLAUDINE

Twelve hundred leagues!—Oh, sit down!—And what chance brings you here to-day?

VÉTHEUIL

No chance. My first thought on arriving in Paris was to come and see you—but I didn't dare.

CLAUDINE

Why? You might have done it—now!

VÉTHEUIL

I might—but still I was afraid. I went to see little Jamine. I heard she lived here, that she'd bought your old apartment. You can imagine what a turn that gave me! I thought something had happened to you, so I went at once to Henriette; she rattled off any number of tales—most of which I didn't understand—I did, however, make out that she was giving a house-warming to which you would naturally be asked, and I thought this a good opportunity of seeing you.

CLAUDINE

She didn't tell me a word about you!

VÉTHEUIL

She was afraid that if you knew perhaps you wouldn't have come.

CLAUDINE

Why?

VÉTHEUIL

I don't know.

CLAUDINE

(*Looking steadfastly at him*) You've aged a little —Why, here's quite a crop of gray hairs——

VÉTHEUIL

I have suffered a great deal: fatigue, hunger, everything imaginable. The greatest suffering was due to you!

CLAUDINE

Is that true?

VÉTHEUIL

Yes! You were deeply rooted in my heart. It was a terrible wrench to leave——

CLAUDINE

Then you did think of me?

VÉTHEUIL

A great deal.—But you haven't changed.

CLAUDINE

It's very nice of you to say it. I *have* changed: I, too, have some gray hairs, only—I dye them a little. I'd rather tell you, so that you may see I have had my share of suffering.

VÉTHEUIL

Dear Claudine! (*A pause*)

CLAUDINE

Do you remember, three years ago, when we sat and talked in this same corner for the first time, and I

was so afraid of your—adventure?—Do you? See how everything I predicted has come true. But we wanted it to happen!

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, we did, yet there was something else which drew us together, and we may well say like children who are scolded: "It's not our fault!" In most cases they are right, it is not their fault if they were born gluttonous, or naughty, or lazy; nor is it our fault if we were born lovers. There are certain fatal forces which drive human beings into each other's arms—the law of Fate is as old as the world. Only, the moralists can't say that, because humanity would take fright.

CLAUDINE

Just as when there is an epidemic in the city the doctors must hide the truth. We are all too weak, we are not sufficiently armed for the battles of life.

VÉTHEUIL

Doubtless. It's all very well to have an exact knowledge of what is right and fitting, but nature endows creatures like us with sensuality and sensibility, and we are as a consequence capable of committing the worst sort of follies. It is a continual struggle.

CLAUDINE

Yes, but *we* have come out of the struggle victorious. (*Smiling*) We come home like victors who have lost legs and arms.

VÉTHEUIL

(*Smiling*) There is something else lacking, too!

CLAUDINE

Oh! We are not wounded now, we're completely cured! We *were* as unhappy as two human beings

could be. Dear Georges, do you remember when we said good-by at Pallanza—that sky sprinkled with stars, the mountains in a shroud of mist—and our friend the fisherman singing "*Vorrei Morire*"?

VÉTHEUIL

He knew we were listening—the old—!

CLAUDINE

And that awful nasal tenor of his! I've sung the song many times since, the dear vulgar old tune! You were right then, everything turned out exactly as you said it would. That night we separated was so beautiful that my suffering became calm and peaceful. But it didn't happen all of a sudden—no! I used to cry myself sick, night after night—I was tired of everything!

VÉTHEUIL

My dear! But what did *they* say to you?

CLAUDINE

I gave vague reasons, foolish ones, or else none at all—they were satisfied. They were so good and affectionate, too! (*A pause*) He never suspected.

VÉTHEUIL

I'm glad of that!

CLAUDINE

But Denise! She understood as much as her little mind would carry. She guessed that it was because of you I suffered, that you were the cause of my tears. Do you know what she did to that big photograph of yours you gave me? She scratched the eyes out!

VÉTHEUIL

She's very advanced for her age!

CLAUDINE

She would have done the same to you in person, if she had been able.

VÉTHEUIL

She's a woman already.

CLAUDINE

You have no reason to complain!

VÉTHEUIL

I was only joking.

CLAUDINE

And now what are you going to do here in Paris? You will be very much in demand—fêted and asked everywhere. Think of it, an explorer! The young ladies will want to know how they make love in the desert——

VÉTHEUIL

I shan't go to receptions and all that. You see, when a man has lived eighteen months as I have, this Parisian life is out of the question. Just now I was watching all those people in there—odious, hateful creatures!—and to listen to their conversation! Grotesque pygmies! What ridiculous dolls they are, men and women alike! They don't live—the way we did on that expedition—— Ah, what character and energy those men had! When you come to know them, you try to become like them. No, I'm going away again, to help colonize.

CLAUDINE

You're right, but it won't be very pleasant for you to be out there all alone?

VÉTHEUIL

(*Rather nervously*) I shan't be all alone: I am going to marry—the sister of one of my companions.

CLAUDINE

What? Why, you've hardly been back a week! You've made rather a hasty decision!

VÉTHEUIL

I've known her for over a month. When we were on our way home to France, she joined us at Saïgon, and we came back together on the same steamer.

CLAUDINE

Is she pretty?

VÉTHEUIL

Not so pretty as you.

CLAUDINE

Don't say that; in a few weeks you'll think her the prettiest of women. You must have a photograph of her with you?

VÉTHEUIL

(*Weakly*) I have.

CLAUDINE

Then show it to me. (*He shows her the photograph*) You are right: she's not pretty, but she looks sweet and energetic. You see, dear, I don't feel at all jealous when I see this picture, and if ever I meet the original, I shall kiss her with all my heart.

VÉTHEUIL

How good you are!

CLAUDINE

Life *is* funny! When I think how for months I did nothing but cry and think of you—! If I saw some one in the street who resembled you, my blood all rushed to my heart, I turned pale, I had to support myself to keep from falling—and now here you are

telling me you are about to marry! I have perfect control over myself; I am glad that I can give you my hand in perfect loyalty and friendship and say I am truly happy!

VÉTHEUIL

You've always been adorable!

CLAUDINE

Well, we're cured, that's all——

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, it was inevitable—and it was good, because we separated like loyal friends. It was terrible, the separation was bitter, but as the surgeons say, it was a clean wound. There was no danger of poisoning —hatred, that is, revenge, anger, the whole base procession of lies—!

CLAUDINE

It was a real duty, and that's a great consolation—the only consolation, I think. (*A pause*) Well, I, too, am going to be married.

VÉTHEUIL

You are?

CLAUDINE

Yes! A great many things have happened since you left.

VÉTHEUIL

I can well imagine!

CLAUDINE

The Countess de Ruyseux ran away with an officer a few weeks ago.

VÉTHEUIL

No?

CLAUDINE

True. Now Ruyseux considers himself free. He's secured a divorce and asked me to become his wife. At first I refused, but later I accepted. We're going to live in the country, on our estate, far from the city. We'll not return to Paris until Denise is eighteen.

VÉTHEUIL

Well, it's a pretty play: ends with two marriages!

CLAUDINE

Yes, but shall we be happy for ever after?

VÉTHEUIL

That's another play. Yet—since we are going to live on the prairies and in the woods, out with peaceful and wise old nature—yes, we shall be happy. Ah, if we remained here, in this city of turmoil and evil, we, playthings of passion that we are, should probably be tempted into some last adventure before the flame finally died down. Toward forty, you would fall in love with a youth who would cause you great suffering and break your heart——

CLAUDINE

Oh, please!

VÉTHEUIL

And I, toward fifty, might fall in love with some child who would lead me a merry chase and take me to new lands again!

CLAUDINE

We have seen enough!

VÉTHEUIL

Yes, when one has lived, and observed, he arrives at a true philosophy of life, and says that at the bot-

tom of it all, happiness, or at least what seems most closely to resemble it——

[*At this moment, interrupting Vétheuil in the midst of his sentence, a "Farandole," danced madly by a number of couples, sweeps into the room, and in its whirlwind wake carries off Claudine and Vétheuil.*

AND THUS ENDS THE FIFTH ACT

[END]

THE FREE WOMAN

(L'AFFRANCHIE)

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

1898

PERSONS REPRESENTED

Roger Dembrun
Pierre Létang
Listel
Damornay
Chérange
A Servant
Antonia De Moldère
Juliette
Madame Rolleboise
Madame Sinnglott
Madame Danglejais
Madame Égreth
Clémence
Mademoiselle Cendrier
Rosalie

THE FREE WOMAN

FIRST ACT

The scene is laid at Venice, in a small palace which has been rented by Madame de Moldère, on the Grand Canal opposite the Da Mula Palace.

It is a May night: half past eight o'clock.

Near one of the windows opening upon the Canal is a small round table with places for five. It is covered with elegant linen, flowers, candles, and so forth.

As the curtain rises Antonia de Moldère, Roger, Pierre, Listel, and Juliette are seated round the table. The dinner is nearly over; the guests are eating dessert. There are fruits on the table.

LISTEL

These strawberries are excellent; I haven't eaten such delicious ones since my First Communion.

ANTONIA

Surely that's an exaggeration! But really the strawberries are very good here.

LISTEL

Well, in Italy, you run very little risk of being spoiled in the matter of eating.

JULIETTE

We don't come to Italy to eat.

ANTONIA

We come to love.

LISTEL

All the more reason: you must eat. But the best of all is to be in your own apartment. Now you did the wisest and most practical thing of all, when you decided to spend some time in Venice: rent a palace or an apartment in a palace on the Grand Canal. Do you mind if I ask how much you are paying here?

ANTONIA

Three hundred francs a month.

LISTEL

And you have the *piano?*

ANTONIA

Naturally.

JULIETTE

Oh, have you a *piano*, Antonia? Where is it?

PIERRE

Not the instrument, dear—in Italian, *piano* means story, too.

JULIETTE

Oh, I see; I didn't know that.

LISTEL

And you have the entire ground floor, or Canal floor, to be more exact?

ANTONIA

Yes, the whole ground floor.

LISTEL

And you pay three hundred francs a month? That's not expensive, not at all expensive.

ANTONIA

But living is not expensive at Venice—it costs next to nothing. What costs is hotel life.

LISTEL

Yes, in Italy all the English hotels are run by the Swiss. They form a syndicate to fleece the tourists. Why, take Switzerland, for instance: the whole country is nothing but a real estate office, the *Louvre* of Nature—the price is on every glacier, and every abyss is marked in plain figures.

JULIETTE

But the gondolas in Venice are very cheap. It's truly touching. For one hour of enchantment you pay a franc—that's not ruinous. But Pierre, who is usually very generous, is horridly stingy with the gondoliers. Every time we come to settle with them, he makes the most ridiculous scenes.

ANTONIA

Is that so, Pierre?

PIERRE

Nothing of the kind. Don't listen to her!

JULIETTE

Yes, yes. In every other way you are lovely—I don't deny that—but with the gondoliers you are simply stingy. So there—I'll make you ashamed before all these people.

[*Laughter.*

ANTONIA

It's very wrong of you.

[*Coffee has meanwhile been served at another table. Antonia gives the signal to rise.*

LISTEL

Still—three hundred francs—very good! How many rooms have you?

ANTONIA

I have a little kitchen.

LISTEL

Cucina.

ANTONIA

One charming bedroom, and then this that I use as a drawing- and dining-room. I dine late usually, have the table placed next to this window and watch the gondolas pass.

LISTEL

As you empty your glass.

ANTONIA

Exactly. Do you take coffee?

LISTEL

If you please. (*Juliette offers him sugar*)

ANTONIA

And you, Pierre?

PIERRE

Delighted.

JULIETTE

Isn't it lovely to hear the gondolas gliding past, and the cry of the gondoliers!

LISTEL

There's nothing remarkable, it seems to me, in that cry—I think it's overdone—rather hideous.

JULIETTE

(*Coldly*) Undoubtedly!

LISTEL

And the sound of the gondolas—nothing at all, yet it's very trying. They say Venice is the city of silence—but you can't sleep—especially this time of the season. And the lovers—turning night into day. Can't close an eye until nearly daylight. If one were sick I presume he would have to put straw under his windows along the Grand Canal!

ROGER

(*Who has hitherto been a silent listener*) How wearisome you must find your cleverness!

LISTEL

In any event, Monsieur, you are spared the fatigue!

ROGER

Of course. (*He disappears with Juliette*)

PIERRE (*to Listel*)

My dear Monsieur, you will make yourself very unpopular with the ladies if you continue criticising Venice. (*He follows after Juliette and Roger*)

LISTEL

Is it my fault if I have an original way of looking at things? (*To Antonia*) You have been here since——?

ANTONIA

For the past two weeks—two weeks, yes! And you?

LISTEL

I arrived yesterday—I leave to-morrow.

ANTONIA

Then it was pure coincidence that we saw you. You're not staying very long.

LISTEL

Venice disgusts me.

ANTONIA

Disgusts you?

LISTEL

Why, yes. (*A pause*) Tell me, who is that disagreeable man who didn't talk and can't understand a joke?

ANTONIA

A friend I met here—charming fellow.

LISTEL

Only—a friend?

ANTONIA

Yes.

LISTEL

Are you sure?

ANTONIA

Quite sure.

LISTEL

Ah. (*A pause*) I was looking at you during dinner: you are very pretty this evening—you are always, but to-night your eyes have something out of the ordinary——

ANTONIA

Really?

LISTEL

Yes—an éclat—I can't just say—you—you seem like a woman who is deeply loved.

ANTONIA

I am—by you. You tell me that, and you keep writing it.

LISTEL

Yes, but it is not I who lend your eyes that particular expression. I don't flatter myself. I have loved you for six years, ever since I first met you. You have never given me definite proofs, and you never will, and yet I shall continue to make love to you. It's rather absurd—but—that's the way it is.

ANTONIA

You're not very unhappy.

LISTEL

Of course—of course—What does this taciturn and disagreeable gentleman do?

ANTONIA

Writes—books.

LISTEL

Humorous?

ANTONIA

Oh no.

LISTEL

I'm surprised. What's his name?

ANTONIA

Roger Dembrun.

LISTEL

? ? ? ? ?

ANTONIA

You couldn't possibly have heard of him: he writes on philosophical questions, and art. It doesn't interest——

LISTEL

Fools. Of course I haven't heard of him!

ANTONIA

No: people in society. My dear Listel, you are very *spirituel* and very amusing, but there are certain things that society never reads. That's what I was going to say.

LISTEL

He's a symbolist, then.

ANTONIA

You're ridiculous, dear. Don't use words of which you can't understand the meaning. What does "symbolist" mean? Do you know?

LISTEL

I beg your pardon. Well, he's very talented. And who is the other gentleman?

ANTONIA

A friend of Monsieur Dembrun—a painter.

LISTEL

Also very talented.

ANTONIA

Not in the least—or, rather—I don't know. I never saw anything of his.

LISTEL

Is that his wife with him?

ANTONIA

No——

LISTEL

Oh—then I might have brought a lady——?

ANTONIA

You know very well that in Venice one mustn't be too——

LISTEL

Certainly. Then you are not quite alone here—I can be reassured——

ANTONIA

Very good of you.

LISTEL

How do you pass the day?

ANTONIA

I don't get up until late, I lunch at noon, and in the afternoon I visit churches or museums, with my friends. We don't do our sight-seeing like the English——

LISTEL

I should hope not!

ANTONIA

A church or a room in a museum is enough for one day. Then from time to time I go to see some pic-

ture that has appealed to me. In that way I have such good friends here and there: at the Accademmia, the Frari, the various palaces. Toward five o'clock I take a gondola and go to the Lido—the awful Lido!—and turn my eyes in the direction of the soft Adriatic. I watch the flotilla of boats from Chioggia with their black, yellow, and red sails. There are some that look like clowns with huge swelling trousers, others like bishops, walking over the sea in sumptuous Dalmatian robes. Or again I go to the lagoons, have the gondola tied to one of the piles and watch the sun set over Saint Mark's. Then of all times Venice looks like an Oriental city. I stay there, rocked by sea and sky, which change color every moment, like the two *Infinités* of Loïe Fuller. It's unspeakably beautiful: fairyland, dreams, paradise!

LISTEL

Yes. Well, however you may feel, Venice has no effect on me. I was fearfully disillusioned: those dreadful steamers—and then I understand that a grill room has been installed in Desdemona's palace.

ROGER

(*Who has overheard Listel's last words*) Not in Desdemona's Palace.

LISTEL

I beg your pardon?

ROGER

You said Desdemona's Palace in order to create a sensation before the company, but you are mistaken. The grill room is in the Swift Palace, which is an annex of the Grand Hotel.

LISTEL

But I assure you——

ROGER

I am positive: I know, because I am stopping at the Grand, which is next door.

LISTEL

It makes little difference.

ROGER

None at all.

LISTEL

Well, I still insist that I am disappointed at every turn. Why, only this afternoon, I found myself surrounded by a party of a hundred Cook's tourists in the courtyard of the Doges' Palace. Took away every spark of illusion.

ANTONIA

When I am in the courtyard of the Doges' Palace I imagine I am present at a *fête* of the Princesses Leonora and Beatrice d'Este, for whom the Bucentaura has been sent, and I can summon up the image of the whole ceremony—regattas, pantomimes and all—I think of the crowds of tourists as dressed in magnificent costumes. I don't mind the barbarians, I don't even notice them.

LISTEL

You have to be well up on your history to imagine the presence of the Machin princesses—I'm awfully rusty.

ANTONIA

That's not altogether necessary, either. Why, the other night we went to the Fenice to hear "La Bôhème." Next to us in a box was the King of Siam and his suite—looked like a cage of monkeys—but I

just remembered that the Republic of Venice used to invite people of that sort, and by that means I became quite excited over the occasion.

LISTEL

You have a very good imagination. But in cases of the kind there must be two.

PIERRE

And that is not always successful. Take poor Musset, for instance.

LISTEL

That's why it is not wise to bring your mistress to Venice. It's better to be there alone, because when there are two, there are always three.

PIERRE

How elusive is happiness! (*A short pause*)

LISTEL

Come in, my dear Pagello.

PIERRE

It seems that Pagello is a very old man. When he refers to George Sand he says: "Ah, si, si, questa Francesa che fumava cigaretti."

JULIETTE

Meaning——?

PIERRE

"Ah, yes, that Frenchwoman who smoked cigarettes." That is all he remembers of a love story about which so much ink has flowed.

ROGER

And so many tears!

ANTONIA

Look, our neighbors across the Canal are having dinner. The maiden lady is going to sing this evening.

PIERRE

Maiden lady?

ANTONIA

English—a Miss Basden, who lives on the other side. When she has company, as she has this evening, the guests gather together at the windows—about eleven o'clock. You can then see a gondola slip from under the shadow of the palace and come to the middle of the Canal. Miss Basden is in it; she sings to the accompaniment of a little guitar.

LISTEL

I regret that I shall be unable to hear her; I must go to the Fenice this evening to hear "La Bôhème." They say it is a very good performance.

ANTONIA

It is, very good. You are sure not to be disappointed—— Isn't he, Juliette?

JULIETTE

Oh, it's perfectly lovely. I cried. (*She hums "Mimi Pinson, La Biondinetta"*)

LISTEL

But with me, Italian music!—I'm Wagnerian.

ROGER

Wagnerian! But Italy is the true setting for Italian music, Monsieur. In Venice, Florence, Naples, you should listen only to Italian music. What is the use of being Wagnerian—here?

LISTEL

That satisfies me—only remember that Verdi began it. (*To Antonia*) Au revoir, Madame, thank you for your cordial welcome.

ANTONIA

You're joking?

LISTEL

(*Bowing to Juliette*) I go—enchanted.

ANTONIA

To be going?

LISTEL

No, by your hospitality. (*He shakes hands with Roger and Pierre*)

ANTONIA

I'll see you out.

LISTEL

Don't bother. (*They go out*)

ROGER

(*When Antonia returns*) Your friend is most exasperating. A true Frenchman away from home—worse still: a Parisian!

ANTONIA

We cannot choose our compatriots.

ROGER

Such people get on my nerves.

JULIETTE

And you don't trouble to conceal your feelings either!

ANTONIA

I even think you are too frank. When I invite one of my friends to my home, I don't like you to allow him to see that he displeases you.

ROGER

Then why do you persist in having unpleasant friends?

[*Listel opens the door.*

LISTEL

Don't trouble—continue as if I hadn't interrupted. I've come to get my cigarette case; I must have left

it on the table. There it is—I have it, I have it! Please don't trouble. Au revoir, I must be going. (*He goes out*)

ANTONIA

Why don't you like him? I think he's very charming.

ROGER

I don't know—his manner of contradicting, his way of criticising everything, that derogatory affectation—— It makes me ill.

PIERRE

But when Frenchmen travel they're unbearable—and the ridiculous things they say!

ANTONIA

It seems so to you, because you don't understand foreign languages. Frenchmen seem worse than the others, but you may be sure that as much nonsense is spoken in English or German.

PIERRE

It's quite possible.

ROGER

Not long ago I was very amused in following two of them at Saint Mark's—two good tradespeople: man and wife. When they came to the mosaic work in turquoise and malachite, the man said: "Not so bad!" and the woman: "Tut, tut, nonsense!"

[*Chords from an orchestra are heard outside.*

JULIETTE

It's beginning. Come quick and listen.

[*She runs to the window, Antonia joining her a moment after. In the distance, in front of the Grand Hotel, a serenade is being sung—accompanied by instruments—by the Concordia Society. Pierre and*

Roger remain where they are, smoking and conversing, stretched out comfortably in their chairs.

PIERRE

(*After listening to the serenade for a few moments*) Let Listel criticise, I say. There's no harm done.

ROGER

Even some good.

PIERRE

Your friend at the window is charming; her dress looks as if it were made of moonlight. She is most alluring—so enchanting, so—and Venice agrees with her. Madame de Moldère exactly fits this city of luxury and voluptuousness. She looks like a doge's wife.

ROGER

Your friend, too, is charming.

PIERRE

Thank you—she is nice—a good little girl. You are very much in love—I can see that.

ROGER

Really?

PIERRE

I should think so! And you are right. Venice is the city of passion: intended as the scene of honeymoons and the breaking off of affairs. But it is a great mistake to bring a calm and settled love here, as I am doing.

ROGER

Why did you come?

PIERRE

(*Pointing to Juliette*) She wanted me to.

ROGER

She had an idea, no doubt, that Venice administered to ailing *liaisons*, as Mentone administers to consumptives?

PIERRE

Yes, and when the patient is too far gone, the Midi finishes them—that's what's happened to me. Ever since I came here, I've been like a madman. In this marvelous setting, this atmosphere of love, I feel an unhealthy desire for the unknown, I dream of adventures with every woman I see, even the little Venetian girl who passes me in the street in her brown shawl, or with the ruddy American who sits next to me at the table in the hotel. I want a rendezvous even if the woman never comes—there is a certain voluptuousness in waiting, and I feel the need of a romance which would illuminate, as it were, my Venetian sojourn.

ROGER

This is serious.

PIERRE

I felt the same way last winter at the Opera Ball. Juliette insisted on my taking her, and I remember, we were sitting in the foyer, close to the wall: she was in a black domino. We were looking at the people who seemed to be enjoying themselves—we were quiet and pensive. She threw confetti—she wanted to create a festive atmosphere, but she was in reality Doña Elvira: she seemed to recognize her lover in the escort of every woman who passed. All those others, those mysterious unknowns, were her rivals.

ROGER

You dare speak of this, with Juliette standing over there, listening to the night music? At this moment she is forming an unforgettable impression of Venice. This is frightful—almost tragic.

PIERRE

Yes, it's horrible. And yet she adores these gondolas, and the serenades—she's all Bridge of Sighs. You know we must always be hiring a gondola. I take my revenge on the gondoliers. I don't give any tips—it's idiotic of me, I know. But I simply can't stand it. I've suffered enough from my "inner life" here. We're going to leave soon.

ROGER

But it will be just the same in Paris.

PIERRE

Yes, I know.

ROGER

Then wouldn't it be better for you both if you told her——?

PIERRE

It's very difficult to say that to a woman——

ROGER

Well, then——?

PIERRE

I know: there's no reason why it should end. One gets used to it all—thirty-five years together: that's what I'm heading for. Sometimes I revolt against the thought, because I've arrived at a dangerous age, and before renouncing love forever I shall have to experience some final intoxication.

ROGER

You're a "woman of thirty."

PIERRE

If you like.

ROGER

You will drag out a miserable existence, and Juliette will be equally unhappy. Wouldn't it be better to tell her the truth?

PIERRE

It is not good to tell all the truth.

ROGER

We allow ourselves to be deluded by false proverbs. All the truth ought to be told, only not every human being is good enough to hear it.

PIERRE

There are things it's difficult to make a woman understand, especially when she's brimful of tenderness and affection, and proves to you every day that she loves you. Not long ago she put a bullet into me —there's the wound, just above the eyebrow.

ROGER

Oh, that's different. You can't be ungrateful! I had no idea——

PIERRE

Yes, that was about six months ago. Juliette wasn't living with me at that time——

ROGER

Of course.

PIERRE

One night I had an appointment—at twelve—with a very pretty woman. It was in my studio. About half past eleven I went to my room. When I opened the door—it was quite dark—I felt an icy hand grasp mine. It was Juliette; she had a presentiment or else she had opened a letter—one of those which

generous people post and forget to sign—well, she was there.

ROGER

I shouldn't have liked to be in your shoes!

PIERRE

Nor I. And just think—I had bought a bottle of Champagne beforehand, and tried my best to get rid of it. I felt ridiculous. You know my studio; you remember there is a little antechamber with a small chest near the door. Well, I opened the cover, then closed the door and the cover at the same time, so that the sound of the two things should coincide.

ROGER

What presence of mind!

PIERRE

Wait! I lighted the lamp. Juliette and I began to talk, and while I assumed an air of perfect tranquillity, I kept thinking of the other woman—all the time. I said to myself: "If only she shouldn't be able to come!" But in those cases they always do! Then—a knock at the door! I opened it—understand? I open the door?

ROGER

You used up all your presence of mind on the Champagne episode, and consequently had none left.

PIERRE

It must have been that. I conducted the woman into the studio, and showed her to a seat. She said to me: "I'm not intruding?" I answered: "Not in the least—on the contrary." At that moment Juliette takes a revolver from her pocket and fires.

ROGER

On you?

PIERRE

No: that would have been logical—on *her*. It wasn't *her* fault, poor woman. Only I sprang in front of her just in time. I was hit. I fell—Juliette thought she had killed me—she fell weeping on my body, while the other got out of the way as fast as she could, more dead than alive.

ROGER

She might have killed you! That's a real drama.

PIERRE

It was. Now you understand that when a woman has done that for you——

ROGER

She might do it again.

PIERRE

No, it's not so much that. If I have gone into detail it was not in order to tell you an interesting story: I wanted merely to let you see what sort of woman Juliette is. The day I tell her that I don't love her any more, she would as likely as not poison herself—I know she has been on the point of doing that more than once before.

ROGER

It is serious. Then are you going to sentence yourself to a life of lies, of treachery?

PIERRE

What can I do?

ROGER

I couldn't stand that.

PIERRE

What then?

ROGER

You must proclaim the right to stop loving. People must become accustomed to a very simple, natural, even fatal, process: eternal love affairs are admirable exceptions, but exceptions none the less. It's monstrous to think of it; in no other circumstances of human life can we make permanently binding promises: in religion, in business, in marriage, in the professions. Two partners can dissolve their relationship, man and wife can divorce, a man can resign his position; and yet our sentimental code will not allow two lovers to break off, and we ask of free love—how ironical!—more than we ask of business, of marriage, of patriotism, even of religion! We shall have to define free unions as those in which the partners are the worst of slaves.

PIERRE

Very true.

ROGER

People must understand that when one of two lovers says: "I do not love you any more," the words are not a personal insult, and that not to be loved any longer is neither shameful nor ridiculous. For, really, one suffers for the most part from hurt pride. How many women are there who wouldn't prefer to see their lovers dead rather than inconstant? And it's the same thing with men. In that case their love is simply a form of vanity, egotism—that's all. If people saw these things clearly, we should be spared many a disaster, and a broken love affair would not be turned into a vendetta where the cast-off lover becomes a Corsican bent on revenge. For

even the most violent sort of love may end in warm friendship——

PIERRE

Just as a fresh evening ends a hot day. No doubt it would be better as you suggest, but that assumes that we repudiate the ideas which we have inherited from time immemorial. Could you indeed prevent those who are the playthings of passion from suffering?

ROGER

No, they will continue to suffer. And if they feel that passion, what better can they ask than to be able to suffer? Only they would be spared calumny, poison, daggers. If we used the language of resignation and justice, we should help the great mass of lovers—merely because we should be looking the truth straight in the face—most of these suffer because people in novels suffer. For instance: put a lover on the stage who leaves his mistress—she has been unfaithful to him—and if he fails to kill her or at least drag her about by the hair, the audience will say he doesn't love her. And yet——!

PIERRE

Your theory is very good, but you yourself——

ROGER

I know what you are going to say, but listen to me: I adore Madame de Moldère, and I have reason to believe that she loves me, but the day she ceases to love me I intend that she shall tell me so, bravely and loyally——

PIERRE

Take care, they are coming back!

[*Antonia and Juliette return in the direction of the men.*

PIERRE

(*To Juliette*) Is the concert over? It was very charming—were you pleased?

JULIETTE

It was adorable! How soft the air is to-night! Do you know what you would do if you were a nice boy, Pierrot?

PIERRE

My name is Pierre. Call me Pietro, if you like; we are in Italy, but not Pierrot.

JULIETTE

You would hire a gondola, Pietro, for an hour.

PIERRE

Again?

JULIETTE

It isn't nice to say that!

PIERRE

Now, my dearest, it's late—time to go home.

JULIETTE

Let's go home in a gondola.

PIERRE

A walk would do us good. We've never walked through the little streets, and I read only this morning in my Baedeker that they are very animated, constituting a veritable theater of curious scenes of the life of the people.

JULIETTE

I don't like to walk.

PIERRE

I don't like to navigate—twice I've just escaped drowning, and I'm always afraid of the water—it's—it's—well, I simply don't like it.

JULIETTE

You never told me that before.

PIERRE

Oh, yes, I have: don't you remember in Paris, when we had to cross the Seine, I invariably took a roundabout way in order to use a bridge?

JULIETTE

I think your joke is in very bad taste.

PIERRE

I know I'm ridiculous, hateful, I'm even unworthy the honor of bearing the name of Pietro, but I have an ungodly horror of gondolas.

ANTONIA

Really, Pierre, you're not at all nice—the dear girl would so appreciate it!

JULIETTE

Look, there's one just passing!

PIERRE

"Just" is good! They pass all the time. Well—hail it!

JULIETTE

(*At the window*) Psst! Psst!

PIERRE

It's not a cab. (*Shouts from the window*) Gondola! Gondola!

ANTONIA

What are you going to do to-morrow?

JULIETTE

Would you care to go to Murano?

ANTONIA

It seems to be a place well worth seeing. Where shall we meet?

JULIETTE

What do you say to one of the thousand little tables at Quadri's?

ANTONIA

Good—at one of the thousand little tables at Quadri's. Now we'll watch you leave.

[*Pierre and Juliette go out.*

ANTONIA

Au revoir, au revoir!

PIERRE'S VOICE

Buona sera!

ANTONIA

Juliette is perfectly charming, and she adores Pierre.

ROGER

Yes.

ANTONIA

But he doesn't love her.

ROGER

You think so?

ANTONIA

I am certain—you know it as well as I: he just spoke to you about it.

ROGER

How do you know?

ANTONIA

Intuition. He dined well, and this evening he was in a confiding mood. It's not hard to see that he doesn't love her. Don't fib now, didn't he tell you?

ROGER

Yes.

ANTONIA

You see? It's too bad! Poor little creature! There's always one who loves more than the other, and that's the one who suffers.

ROGER

But how bored the other is!

ANTONIA

Are you bored?

ROGER

I was not speaking of you and me.

ANTONIA

No, you refer to ordinary lovers.

ROGER

Yes.

ANTONIA

I shouldn't call Juliette vulgar. She's very refined in some ways. But what sort of man is he?

ROGER

Nice fellow—only he doesn't love her—any more.

ANTONIA

She still has all her illusions.

ROGER

The question resolves itself into whether it would be better to allow her to keep them or take them from her. That was the subject of our conversation.

ANTONIA

And you advised him——?

ROGER

Simply to tell Juliette that he did not love her.

ANTONIA

Simply? Simplest thing in the world—only it means farewell. Farewell! You advised him to do that?

How frightful love is! I don't like to think about it——

ROGER

You mustn't.

ANTONIA

Yet you will leave me some day—if you want to.

ROGER

Now you're only flirting, and you don't believe a word you say. You know that if one of us tires of the other, it will be you—yes, you!

ANTONIA

Then you'll kill me.

ROGER

No, I shall not kill you.

ANTONIA

Yes, you will—otherwise it is serious.

ROGER

Then let it be serious. But I say I will not kill you because you will not love me then: that's your right.

ANTONIA

Are you in earnest?

ROGER

Very much. (*Antonia quickly rises*) What's the matter?

ANTONIA

You, you don't love me, you can't love me, if you even foresee the possibility of my ceasing to love you. You can't imagine how much you are to me, how deeply you have made me love you; and when there's —now here you come, to me, who adore you heart and soul, and express doubts like that—horrible!

ROGER

I'm terribly sorry, please forgive me—please. I never thought you'd take it this way.

ANTONIA

How should I take it? Put yourself in my place.

ROGER

It was my fault. See, I'm very, very sorry.

ANTONIA

Why did you say it?

ROGER

Why? Simply because my mind was running in that channel this evening. The result of our conversation, the one I had with Pierre. When I think of certain things, and watch what is happening about us, near us—and also when I recall——

ANTONIA

Yes, I know, but because you have known women who have lied to you, is that any reason why I should be insincere? If they deceived you, why should you think me unfaithful? My dear friend, don't judge me according to their standards, don't torture me with the instruments your experience has taught you to use.

ROGER

You shouldn't blame me. I love you so much that there are times when I do the stupidest things.

ANTONIA

Don't complicate our love, don't throw obstacles in its way; above all, don't develop a romantic soul——

ROGER

I? Good Lord——!

ANTONIA

I am so near you, you must know that no one is between us.

ROGER

You are right.

[*There is a short silence, then a shrill voice, accompanied by a mandolin, is heard outside.*

ANTONIA

You hear? Our venerable English lady. Come and see her.

ROGER

Poor creature—it's really pathetic! She loves to listen to her own voice; she's intoxicated with it, the way a peasant gets intoxicated on his own second-rate wine. She has no lover, and in order to drag out her wretched existence she imagines poetic episodes—— We ought at least to respect her.

ANTONIA

We should pity her with all our heart. Often I see tall youths who come to visit Venice with their parents. The museums must bore them fearfully, but how their eyes sparkle when they look at the women: they are like young captive barbarians. I look at them occasionally and smile: I consider that a good deed—an act of charity. You're not jealous, are you? Of course I look only at the homely ones: they need it. One look, one smile—it's not much.

ROGER

It's a great deal for them: it gives them something to dream about. I remember when I came to Venice for the first time, sixteen years ago: I was a little fellow, I could see nothing in Giovanni Bellini. If

a woman like you had deigned to look at me, I should have thought myself a god!

ANTONIA

And now you have that look, as well as my eyes—and you are only a man! But I am willing to have you look at the little girls who come here with their Papas and Mammas; look at them as long as you like—only—hands off!

ROGER

You needn't worry.

ANTONIA

Let me see, what is to-day? I lose track of dates here.

ROGER

It must be the twentieth.

ANTONIA

We must leave soon.

ROGER

Why? There is no reason——

ANTONIA

It's getting very hot, and June is dangerous—you might come down with fever. The canals are most unhealthy. We'll go somewhere, it makes little difference where, so long as we are alone. Only I should like to go to a place where you have never been with a woman—if there is such a place.

ROGER

Oh, yes, there are some.

ANTONIA

Do I know them?

ROGER

You are trying to complicate our love!

ANTONIA

You are right. I prefer not to think of that at all. Yet you are not what I should call a Don Juan.

ROGER

Is that a reproach?

ANTONIA

Oh, no. Don Juan didn't remain faithful to one woman long enough—no, he was a sublime sparrow! Thank God, you are not a ladies' man, you are not even a man-about-town. Already your heart is a cemetery.

ROGER

But a cemetery means death, oblivion!

ANTONIA

It's not oblivion with men: each mistress has her gravestone, her inscription, and her little cross.

ROGER

That's the least we can do.

ANTONIA

But it is too much. With us women, when we love a man, everything else disappears: our life begins from the day we know him. There is no cross, no inscription in our heart—it is absolute forgetfulness.

ROGER

Ah, the common ditch for the dead!

ANTONIA

Why do you say that? How careful I have to be about what I say to you! I must weigh every word —soon I shan't dare to talk. I said that because I've heard it said to my women friends a hundred times, and because I have observed it so often, in the case of others. I don't refer to myself, it has nothing to do with me. Ah, if you only knew! "Com-

mon ditch for the dead!" Really, you seem to imagine——

ROGER

I imagine nothing at all.

ANTONIA

Of course you weren't childish enough to say it, but you thought——!

ROGER

Nothing of the kind.

ANTONIA

Oh, come, some one must have told you——?

ROGER

I have been told nothing.

ANTONIA

But I'm sure—some one must have told you dreadful lies about me. Do you think I haven't heard some of the awful stories about myself? And why not? I'm a widow, I have money, I'm independent, and a great many men try to make love to me. Calumny must creep in somehow!

ROGER

Why get so excited about it?

ANTONIA

Because I love you!

ROGER

I swear I have been told nothing at all. You know me very well, too; you know I have not tried to find out anything.

ANTONIA

You might have! But of course, you are not at all curious—you're not jealous—you never asked me a single question!

ROGER

Because I had no right to. I was master of your life only from the day you told me you loved me, the day you became mine. I'm not like other men. Nowadays people seem to recognize the right of lovers to search in the past of their mistresses, and are only too happy to find that they have a past! The greater part of the time we imagine in perfectly good faith that they should have waited for *us!* Poor creatures! When we question them, they give precisely what answers please them, and they are right!—If I have never questioned you about your past life, don't imagine for an instant that I was not interested. Very often my mind wanders, vaguely, to certain things, and I am very unhappy.

ANTONIA

And—and you really suffer?

ROGER

I do.

ANTONIA

I'm so sorry. Dear, dear love, I don't want you to be unhappy, I don't want you to suffer any more. For a long time I've been wanting to tell you—there must be no mysteries, no secrets between us—no long silences when our minds wander, when we think too much. There is nothing in my past to make you too unhappy, only when you have heard the story of my life up to the time I came to know you, you will, I am sure, pity me—that is, if you believe me.

ROGER

Yes, yes, I will believe you.

ANTONIA

There are certain things which, when we look at them, enlarge our souls. Can one be gay in the presence of a sunset, or can one tell a lie in the melancholy splendor of sleeping Venice? (*She turns out the lamp*)

ROGER

What are you doing?

ANTONIA

It's too bright—I want to talk to you in the dark. (*She sits down next to him*) Sit near me—close, so close—give me your hand. Now—you love me?

ROGER

I adore you.

ANTONIA

Now I'll begin. In order to have you understand about my marriage, I must tell you about my wretched early education; not wretched from a material point of view, but moral. What examples I had! Now when my mother remarried, my father was the French consul at Tiflis——

[*As she continues, the curtain falls.*

SECOND ACT

Antonia's handsome apartment on the Champs-Élysées, Paris. The drawing-room.

As the curtain rises Pierre is seated reading. Rosalie, the maid, enters and fixes the fire.

ROSALIE

Madame says she has just this moment come in and will see you at once. If Monsieur would care to see the papers, the evening editions are here. Here are the *Temps* and the *Débats*.

PIERRE

Thank you, Rosalie.

[*He unfolds the Temps in a mechanical manner. After a few seconds, enter Antonia.*

ANTONIA

I've kept you. Have you been waiting long?

PIERRE

I've been here since half past four.

ANTONIA

I'm so sorry. Why did you come so soon?

PIERRE

When I left you the day before yesterday you said: "Come at half past four, and we can have a chat together before the guests arrive."

ANTONIA

Did I say that? Possibly—I forgot all about it. I did come home later than I had intended, however. I always have so many things to do!

PIERRE

I should imagine so. What have you been doing to-day?

ANTONIA

Nothing much. I went to the Bois.

PIERRE

Alone?

ANTONIA

No: with my niece, who is now in the house.

PIERRE

So your niece is here with you? She's not been here long, has she?

ANTONIA

During the past week. I thought I had already told you? Yes, my sister wanted me to take care of her while she was away. She went to Vienna, to be gone a month. So I took the girl with me to-day to enjoy the fresh air.

PIERRE

Many people in the Bois?

ANTONIA

I can't say—I didn't notice—I drove through the deserted lanes, at full speed. I love it! The Bois is very pretty in winter. People don't apprcciate it half enough. Then I dismounted and walked a little, by the side of a lake; it seemed to be ailing and desolate. The sun was setting opposite me; it seemed so cold in that pale sky! It was so sad I wanted to cry.

PIERRE

(*Taking her hand*) Poor dear!

ANTONIA

(*Drawing back her hand, as she says nervously*) You mustn't pity me, I enjoy that melancholy sensation!

PIERRE

Very well.

ANTONIA

The cold, the twilight, the solitude—it was all exquisite. I don't know whether you are like me, but I love to be alone, and I never feel lonesome. (*A short silence*) Is that all you have to say?

PIERRE

What do you want me to say? You are not in the least encouraging.

ANTONIA

Encouraging—for what?

PIERRE

I leave you two days ago in a very friendly frame of mind, even a little bit in love, yes, in love, and I now find you absolutely changed, cold. You have even forgotten our appointment, the appointment you made. I've been waiting for you for an hour, ah, how impatiently!

ANTONIA

You should not have waited.

PIERRE

That isn't the question. Here you receive me as you would an ordinary bore—you don't care to see me! If I do bore you, why not tell me?

ANTONIA

But you don't bore me.

PIERRE

I don't know, but every time I see you I have to begin all over again, as if I had met you for the first time. You seem to forget where we left off before.

ANTONIA

I can't keep track of things that way. It's not my fault; you must take me as I am.

PIERRE

I ask nothing better than to "take you as you are" —but you trouble me, you make me afraid. Perhaps you are amused——

ANTONIA

No, I am not!

PIERRE

Nor am I. One day you allow me to have great hopes, and the next you forget everything; or else you pretend——

ANTONIA

No, I don't pretend!

PIERRE

Yes, you do. Well, I can't understand a thing. I don't know.

ANTONIA

Nor I. Really, I don't.

PIERRE

At least you are sure I love you? From the day I met you at Venice, I loved you—I told you then, and you allowed me to make love to you.

ANTONIA

Every woman likes that.

PIERRE

Yes, but you knew how much it meant to me. I explained to you how I lived and how anxiety had crept

into my quiet life: the bitterness of joy is as much a fact as the intoxication of suffering. I shall suffer with you.

ANTONIA

Then why do you ask for a change?

PIERRE

Merely because it will *be* a change. You, you have at last come into my life: you were the dream, the adventure, the romance, the chimera, the beyond—the indispensable. I fell madly in love with you. Now what are you going to do?

ANTONIA

I have no idea.

PIERRE

Don't you know?

ANTONIA

No, you must decide.

PIERRE

You are so imperious that I find it very difficult.

ANTONIA

But I like to be commanded.

PIERRE

Shall I burn my ships? I have no objection, but they refuse to burn.—Very well, since you wish it. Oh, here is something I wanted to give you. (*He takes a jewel case from his pocket and gives it to Antonia*)

ANTONIA

(*Opening the case*) A key?

PIERRE

Yes, a key.

ANTONIA

Why?

PIERRE

You know: it's the key to the apartment.

ANTONIA

What apartment?

PIERRE

You know. Why do you try to make it more embarrassing for me? And at this time? It's very unkind of you. I've been carrying it around with me for a month, wanting to give it to you, but not daring: *I couldn't find an opportunity.* Don't you remember? One day you told me—or rather, authorized me, allowed me——? (*He hesitates a moment, embarrassed, then proceeds resolutely and quickly*) Well, it's near here: Rue de Balzac, Number Seventeen, first floor right. You'll see, there are three steps.

ANTONIA

The audacity! (*A child is heard crying*) Wait one moment—what's the matter with that child? (*She rings*)

[*Enter Rosalie.*

ROSALIE

Did Madame ring?

ANTONIA

Yes, Rosalie. Please ask Mademoiselle Cendrier to come to me. I can't imagine what's the trouble now —perhaps she's nervous—or angry. It may be one of her fits of temper.

[*Rosalie goes out, and Mademoiselle Cendrier comes in a moment later.*

MADEMOISELLE CENDRIER

Does Madame want me?

ANTONIA

Yes, Mademoiselle Cendrier. I wanted to tell you that that child's crying is inexcusable, and that you should be able to make her stop.

MADEMOISELLE CENDRIER

Madame, I seem to have no influence over Mademoiselle Yvette: she refuses to practice her music lessons, and insists on saying naughty things about the author of her "method," Monsieur Le Couppey. She says she'd rather die than play the Eighth Recreation, which she says is too difficult.

ANTONIA

You may tell Mademoiselle Yvette that she shall have no dessert this evening, and that if she fails to play the Eighth Recreation without a mistake before dinner she shall not go riding with me tomorrow.

MADEMOISELLE CENDRIER

Very well, Madame, I shall tell her. (*She goes out*)

PIERRE

Poor little child! That Eighth Recreation is really very hard work. Reminds me of the time when I was a little fellow, taking piano lessons. I disliked it—I remember, too, how I was made to lift my fingers, one after the other——

ANTONIA

Independence Exercises, those are called.

PIERRE

And when my mother went out she tied me to the piano by a rope—in order that I should learn my Independence Exercises! I see that educational methods have not changed since my day.

[*A rather long pause.*

ANTONIA

So—you imagine that I shall come to your apartment?

PIERRE

I don't know—I have no idea—but I shall wait. When you are bored, when you feel the need of being comforted, being taken care of with infinite tenderness——

ANTONIA

Hush! The key is very pretty!

PIERRE

I had it copied from one that belonged to a Louis XV *escritoire.*

ANTONIA

You needn't be so sad about it. It's very, very pretty. What must the apartment be if the key is made of gold?

PIERRE

The door is of wood! You'll see—it's very simple—but I think it will please you. I'm so nervous and excited—I'm anxious to have it please you!

ANTONIA

Do I make you so afraid as all that? How timid you are! I'm surprised.

PIERRE

Is that so remarkable?

ANTONIA

Well, men who are successful with women are usually more enterprising, bolder——

PIERRE

I'm not so "successful"!

ANTONIA

Nonsense! You are the sort of man a woman shoots.

PIERRE

Please don't refer to that ridiculous story.

ANTONIA

There is nothing ridiculous about it, it's most flattering, I think. By the way, how is your friend?

PIERRE

Very well, thank you.

ANTONIA

I can still see the wound. How splendid it is to be loved like that! Remarkable, for you're really rather ordinary.

PIERRE

I know it, but you are very extraordinary. Why did you say that? Listen to me: it's now half past five; the visitors will soon be here—will you come?

ANTONIA

I don't know.

PIERRE

Naturally, I don't ask you to come to-morrow or the day after—I shan't try to fix a day—I shouldn't like to do that. I shall wait for you every day.

ANTONIA

Every day! Don't talk nonsense—what if I never come? No, let me write, it's much simpler. I can do that, for I don't imagine your letters are opened at the Rue de Balzac?

PIERRE

Of course not. Then if you are going to write, I had better let you have the name under which I rented the apartment. Of course, I didn't use my real name.

ANTONIA

I should think not.

PIERRE

Write to M. Mérowig O'Coddy—O—apostrophe—two d's and a y.

ANTONIA

Couldn't you have found a simpler name? This one is so unusual.

PIERRE

Exactly: in such cases people choose ordinary, well-known names, and that is a great mistake. Suppose some one had a reason for asking, and inquired of the concierges who lived on the ground floor. He is told: M. Aubry or M. Durand—no! But if he is told: M. Mérowig O'Coddy, there is no room for suspicion—he will think: Ah, yes, the young man who writes for the *Mercure de France*. He will not insist.

ANTONIA

Very ingenious. I'm very glad to see that you think of everything: with you, passion does not exclude forethought or prudence.

PIERRE

Why do you blame me? I am prudent, but it is for you as well as for myself; it is to your interest that no one know of it——

ANTONIA

That is all very well, Mérowig O'Coddy, this is a good deal more than prudence. Don't deny you were mortally afraid of Juliette.

PIERRE

Nothing of the sort!

ANTONIA

Don't be a child. Oh, and how is your little friend?

PIERRE

You have already asked me: very well, thank you.

ANTONIA

Don't try to conceal it: you *were* terribly afraid?

PIERRE

That's ungenerous and unjust. You know very well I am not afraid of her, only I don't want to cause her unnecessary pain. Otherwise what risk do I run? Juliette and I are not married; I have sworn no oaths at the town hall or in the church; she has no parents to whom I am responsible for her happiness. Now if I take precautions, it is for her sake, and not for mine. What you call fear is much more like pity. Yes, the love I have for you makes me pity her. When we love each other, we can be truly happy, but let us leave her at least the appearance of happiness!

ANTONIA

Yet the moment I wish it, you are willing to sacrifice her for me. But I shan't ask you—you are right, we mustn't allow her to suffer. I myself shouldn't be happy if I knew we were the cause of any sorrow to that dear good child.

PIERRE

You have a very tender heart. Then, may I hope?

ANTONIA

I can never remember that name——

PIERRE

Let me write it for you.

[*He takes a card case from his pocket; a photograph falls to the floor, which he quickly picks up.*

ANTONIA
What is that?

PIERRE
Nothing.

ANTONIA
Nothing?

PIERRE
A picture.

ANTONIA
Juliette's?

PIERRE
No—mine.

ANTONIA
Show it to me.

PIERRE
It's nothing at all.

ANTONIA
Show it to me.—Don't be ridiculous. (*He shows her the picture*) It's very nice—flattering. Is it for me?

PIERRE
Well, I——

ANTONIA
What?

PIERRE
That's the only one I have. I've just found it and I was going to take it to Juliette—this evening.

ANTONIA
That makes no difference.

PIERRE
I'll give you another, this is only a proof.

ANTONIA

It is; it is the proof I want.—Careful! There's the bell. They're beginning to come.

[*She slips the picture between the leaves of a book, which lies on the small table next to her.*

SERVANT

(*Announcing*) Monsieur Listel.

LISTEL

(*Enters and bows to Antonia*) I hope you are well, Madame?

ANTONIA

Thanks. And you, Fernand?

LISTEL

Not at all well.

ANTONIA

Do you know M. Pierre Létang?

LISTEL

I had the pleasure of dining with Monsieur at your apartment in Venice.

[*Listel and Pierre shake hands.*

ANTONIA

That's so.—Well, is there any news?

LISTEL

Don't speak about it! I've just come from Auteuil, where my friend Raflard had a fearful fall. He tried to jump the stream. Had to be taken away on a stretcher. He's seriously injured, I believe.

ANTONIA

Those obstacle races are frightful. Yet they are the only kind I like.

PIERRE

They're very bad for your heart.

ANTONIA

They do make me ill, but I like to see them all the same. I've thought of a plan that I think very clever.

LISTEL

You have?

ANTONIA

I play rather heavily, and if the horse I have all my money on falls, I say to myself that my money falls with it, and my sorrow for the loss is set against my pity for the horse and rider. But if the other horses fall, aren't they merely hated rivals, eliminated from the chase?

LISTEL

Simple, but it is really an entire system of philosophy. True happiness can be attained by these means, in spite of adversity. You must be very happy!

ANTONIA

I am not unhappy, but I have a rather monotonous time of it. I just told you——

LISTEL

You like obstacles. Yet it lies entirely with you, Madame, to make of your Longchamps a marvelous Auteuil.

PIERRE

Never lose hope, Madame, accidents will occur soon enough—glory and defeat, too.

ANTONIA

May Heaven hear you!

SERVANT

(*Announcing*) Madame Danglejais.

ANTONIA

(*Going to greet Madame Danglejais, who enters*) My dear, how long have you been in Paris?

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

Since the day before yesterday; this is my first call.

ANTONIA

It's lovely of you! I'm so glad to see you!

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

I have any number of things to talk over with you!

ANTONIA

I should think so!

PIERRE

(*Rising*) I must go, Madame.

ANTONIA

So soon? You have made a short visit! Good-by, then; I hope you will come soon again, and not wait eternities before calling—(*To Listel*) Why do you laugh?

LISTEL

Did I?

ANTONIA

Then why do you smile?

LISTEL

Because in ordinary conversation big words like eternity often mean extremely short periods: two or three days at the most.

ANTONIA

How true, and how many exaggerations we utter every moment!

LISTEL

Yes, every moment.

PIERRE

(*Bowing to Madame Danglejais*) Madame—(*To Listel*) Good day, Monsieur.

[*He goes out.*

LISTEL

Very charming, Létang, so sympathetic! Do you ever see his friend, the lady we dined with at Venice?

ANTONIA

No, I haven't seen her since. But then I don't know her. I received her that night because I couldn't very well have had Létang leave her at the hotel. And then in Venice, you know, it's not so important as here in Paris——

LISTEL

Of course: you couldn't possibly——

ANTONIA

It is difficult.—Of course, she is very nice and cultured—almost fit for society!

LISTEL

Quite. Do you know who she is, by the way?

ANTONIA

No.

LISTEL

The illegitimate daughter of the Duc de Sambleu, you know, the famous Duc de Sambleu who created such a stir during the last years of the Empire—they called him La Vadrouille.

ANTONIA

Oh, is she his daughter? Well, I'm not in the least surprised. Blood will out!

LISTEL

Yes, his daughter by the celebrated Florence Roulier. The child was well educated: convent, Conservatoire,

Odéon—*that* is where Létang first saw her; he fell in love with her and took her off the stage.—She's pretty.

ANTONIA

No, she is not pretty.

LISTEL

She has a great deal of charm—and she adores him.

ANTONIA

That is the important point.

LISTEL

And she's so jealous!

ANTONIA

So it appears!

LISTEL

She shot him. You know the story?

ANTONIA

(*Impatiently*) Yes, yes, I know it. (*To Madame Danglejais*) Have you returned to stay, or not?

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

Oh, I shall stay for some time. I've just been traveling all over Europe. I've seen all the men and women who are interested in our cause. I've talked with Ibsen.

ANTONIA

Madame Danglejais, you know, is deeply interested in the Woman Movement.

LISTEL

Oh ho! Really? Very interesting. You have a great deal to do.

ANTONIA

I should think so!

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

You should be a Feminist, Monsieur, like all intelligent people.

LISTEL

It may not be very modest of me, Madame, but I must confess that I have Feministic tendencies.

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

Good! Yes, I have returned with a stock of new ideas. One must travel and see what people are doing in other countries. I have a great plan. Now in France we are very narrow——

SERVANT

(*Announcing*) Monsieur Damornay.

ANTONIA

What an agreeable surprise! (*To Damornay as he enters*) My dear friend!

DAMORNAY

How are you, my dear Madame? You are always well, I don't have to ask. You are prettier and more bewitching than ever.

ANTONIA

And you are as always the most gallant man in the world. Where have you been? What have you done this summer?

DAMORNAY

I have spent the season at Contrexéville, as usual.

ANTONIA

Is it pretty there?

DAMORNAY

Frightful. Imagine a cage just large enough to walk around in—see the same people all the time.

ANTONIA

Any old acquaintances?

DAMORNAY

Not a single one.

ANTONIA

Was Madame Damornay with you?

DAMORNAY

No, my wife went to Vichy for her liver.

ANTONIA

With her daughter, no doubt?

DAMORNAY

No, my daughter was at Salies-de-Béarn—to take the mud baths.

LISTEL

(*Aside to Madame Danglejais*) Charming family! So Parisian!

ANTONIA

Why, I had no idea your daughter was ill?

DAMORNAY

Oh, yes, unfortunately she——

[*He continues in an undertone, as:*

LISTEL

(*To Madame Danglejais*) So you conversed with Ibsen, Madame?

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

Yes, I had that thrilling experience.

LISTEL

What sort of man is he?

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

A very extraordinary man.

LISTEL

I should think so, but I meant——

SERVANT

(*Announcing*) Monsieur Chérange.

CHÉRANGE

(*Enters, and bows to Antonia*) Madame! I trust you are well?

ANTONIA

Thank you. (*Introducing*) Monsieur Chérange, Monsieur Damornay. Monsieur is author of the book of the hour: a study on the *Cultivation of Unhealthy Sensations*, a work, as the title suggests, of the highest idealism.

DAMORNAY

I have read it. I am astonished to see how erudite a book could come from a man as young as Monsieur!

CHÉRANGE

Monsieur, Pascal wrote his *Traité des coniques* at the age of sixteen.

DAMORNAY

I understand that, Monsieur, but I meant that your work revealed wide experience, maturity, dyspepsia even.

SERVANT

(*Announcing*) Madame Egreth.

MADAME EGRETH

(*Who enters*) Ah, Madame!

ANTONIA

I am very glad to see you, Madame! I have not had the pleasure for a long time. Is Monsieur Egreth well?

MADAME EGRETH

Very well, Madame, thank you.

ANTONIA

And your little boy—Alfred, I believe?

MADAME EGRETH

Yes, Alfred. But he's a big boy now.

ANTONIA

How old is he?

MADAME EGRETH

Eight years.

ANTONIA

Eight years? Why, the last time I saw him he was in long dresses. Is he as dear as ever?

MADAME EGRETH

Oh, yes. And he's such a comfort to us; he's working very hard, too.

ANTONIA

So soon? At what?

MADAME EGRETH

We want him to prepare for the Ecole polytéchnique.

ANTONIA

You are beginning early.

MADAME EGRETH

One cannot begin too early. It's becoming more and more difficult every day to enter the government schools, the Polytéchnique in particular.

ANTONIA

Do you want him to enter the Artillery?

MADAME EGRETH

Oh, no, I hardly think he would care for a military career: he's so tender-hearted—he's just like a little girl.

ANTONIA

What then?

MADAME EGRETH

His teacher thinks he has a gift for mathematics, and as he works very hard, we hope he may go into the tobacco business.

LISTEL

And why shouldn't he?

MADAME EGRETH

We hope so, but we don't talk about it too much.

ANTONIA

Very wise, I'm sure.

DAMORNAY

Dear Madame, will you please introduce me to Madame Egreth?

ANTONIA

Certainly. (*To Madame Egreth*) Monsieur Damornay.

DAMORNAY

I think, Madame, we are neighbors in the country. I live near Louviers, in the Eure—the name of the estate is Chésneraye.

MADAME EGRETH

Ah, yes, Monsieur.

DAMORNAY

I have had the pleasure of chatting with your husband occasionally. We get along beautifully together. I have met you, too, in your carriage—you were driving a little chestnut pony that I adore.

MADAME EGRETH

You are very good. He returns it.

DAMORNAY

The pony?

MADAME EGRETH

No, my husband.

ANTONIA

That's so, you did spend the summer in the country. You went to sound your electors.

DAMORNAY

Yes—a little.

ANTONIA

What do they have to say?

DAMORNAY

Don't speak of it! Frightful! I don't know where we are going nowadays: Socialism is making terrible headway; and you meet peasants that don't tip their hats, and don't even say, "How do you do?"

LISTEL

Awful! The spirit is as bad in the country as it is in the city!

DAMORNAY

Monsieur, conditions are so deplorable that the people I employ on my farms never use the third person in speaking to me. They say, "Very well, Monsieur, you're wrong," or else, "Monsieur, give me my money!"

CHÉRANGE

It makes you think. We are beginning to regret the *Ancien régime.*

DAMORNAY

But I am an old Republican—never doubt that.

CHÉRANGE

God knows I can read it on your face!

DAMORNAY

I have proved myself: by using my rifle and building barricades. Yet, I must confess that familiarity with those people disgusts me.

CHÉRANGE

But if the peasants have ceased to use the third person, it was only because they saw there was no third person to address.

DAMORNAY

What do you mean?

CHÉRANGE

We must conceive the third person as a symbolic figure: it is not you in person, but some one above you, some one with a mission, some representative of Providence for those good peasants: a protector and friend. That is the significance of the third person; and when they speak to this hypothetical entity, it does not answer them as a rule. Therefore they do not address it.

DAMORNAY

A very original explanation, at least. Funny, too!

CHÉRANGE

Odd, isn't it?

MADAME EGRETH

(*Rising, as if moved by a spring*) Good-by, Madame.

ANTONIA

What? So soon?

MADAME EGRETH

I must run, I have so many visits to pay!

ANTONIA

Give my kindest regards to your husband and to the Polytechnician.

MADAME EGRETH

I shall be glad to.

[*She goes out.*

ANTONIA

I wonder what put it into her head to call on me today? I haven't seen her for five years—I couldn't think of a thing to say to her. Why did she come?

LISTEL

Very simple: she wanted to establish an alibi.

ANTONIA

How do you mean?

LISTEL

She has a lover—named Lapoix—it started scarcely two weeks ago. They meet near here: Rue Bassano —just about this time.

ANTONIA

Listel is marvelous: he knows everything and everybody.

LISTEL

It was not difficult to put the pieces together; as she was coming from the Rue Bassano some one saw her. She was thought to be in another part of the city at that time, and in order to justify her presence here, she called on you—elementary case of alibi.

ANTONIA

That little Madame Egreth? Are you positive?

LISTEL

Positive. Everyone knows about it.

ANTONIA

And what does Monsieur Egreth say to it all?

LISTEL

He says nothing.

ANTONIA

Because he knows nothing.

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

There is a Monsieur Egreth who lectures on Feminism; is this the one?

ANTONIA

Yes.

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

A very remarkable man.

LISTEL

In what way?

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

I mean he lectures very interestingly.

SERVANT

(*Announcing*) Madame Rolleboise. Madame Sinnglott.

[*As these ladies enter, they are introduced. The usual formalities are gone through.*

ANTONIA

How stunning you are, ladies! Where have you come from?

MADAME SINNGLOTT

We have just come from *La Bodinière*, where we heard Monsieur Egreth lecture.

ANTONIA

Was it interesting?

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

Intensely. He spoke like a god! *There* is a man who understands—Woman!

LISTEL

His wife!

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

What did he talk about?

MADAME SINNGLOTT

He said that women were entitled to receive, directly, all the husband's income, and to dispose of it as they thought best.

LISTEL

How appropriate! Perfect!

ANTONIA

Really, Listel, you are too cynical!

LISTEL

I said nothing!

SERVANT

(*Announcing*) Monsieur Roger Dembrun.

[*Roger enters, is welcomed by Antonia, who introduces him to the guests.*

LISTEL

(*Shaking hands with Roger*) My dear Monsieur, we were destined to meet to-day.

ROGER

Indeed!

ANTONIA

We were on the topic of Feminism; these ladies are very excited about it—they've just come from Monsieur Egreth's lecture.

ROGER

Ah, yes.

MADAME SINNGLOTT

Were you there, Monsieur?

ROGER

No, but I have heard him before.

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

Don't you think he is very talented?

ROGER

No, Madame, but he is an orator: he says vague things in an extremely convincing manner.

MADAME SINNGLOTT

Are you a Feminist, Monsieur?

ROGER

That depends on the women, Madame, and also on what they demand.

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

We ask only what is our right. For instance, that a married woman shall not forever be the doll, the plaything of her husband, that she have a voice in the education of the child, that she have the right to dispose of her fortune, and be prepared for the time when her husband tries to squander her dowry——

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

The principle of separation of property has already been accepted and put into practice in many countries, notably in Turkey. Is it not shameful that Turkey is so far ahead of us in a reform of this kind?

MADAME SINNGLOTT

So that a Turkish woman is no more a slave now than a French woman. In France a woman contracts by marriage to deliver herself to her husband; she owes him the *decubitum conjugalem* on demand. It's as bad as the Napoleonic Code, if we can credit Stendhal!

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

Or the Pandour Code.

MADAME SINNGLOTT

It's the worst sort of bondage, the most abject form of slavery. Why, in Turkey at least, the women can divide their burdens.

LISTEL

Of course, and yet you will hear wives complain that their husbands fail to fulfill all their obligations. It is true that with certain women it would be a case of the Danaïds.

DAMORNAY

What else do you ask?

MADAME SINNGLOTT

We wish to be able to enter the liberal professions and enjoy the same civil rights as men.

DAMORNAY

(*Laughing*) Would you like to vote?

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

Why not? If we pay taxes, is it any more than just that we elect those who control taxation, or elect even some of our own number? In a word, that we become candidates?

DAMORNAY

It's impossible, quite impossible!

MADAME SINNGLOTT

Is it not monstrous that my own servant votes, while I cannot, that he helps to elect deputies who will make and uphold laws which are directed against me, a woman?

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

It's positively sickening!

CHÉRANGE

You are perfectly right, Mesdames.

DAMORNAY

It's downright madness, I say!

CHÉRANGE

Oh, no, Monsieur. You are an old Republican, and you admit no progress. You are the incarnation of the sinister spirit of Jacobinism, you have not yet gone beyond the Rights of Man. Yet Universal Suffrage was a most illogical institution, it caused results which were false—and why should not women have their place in all this? We must be just, surely.

DAMORNAY

Shall they be given seats in the House, and the Senate?

CHÉRANGE

Why not? Let them be lawyers, engineers, judges, and doctors. Only in their own interest, I advise them not to try to accomplish anything, for if they pretend to compete with us, the whole thing will end in the death of gallantry. When they become as strong as we, then they must not expect to depend on their weakness.

LISTEL

Because that would be fulfilling several offices at the same time.

CHÉRANGE

Quite. They would lose sexually what they have gained socially. Already what our fathers called the "bagatelle"—for them the principal thing—is for us in reality nothing more than such. The importance of their little infamies, their betrayals, their favors or their refusal to grant them, has diminished in our eyes. If we were to rewrite *Antony* we should say, "She resisted me; I did not insist." And if we surprised our worst mistress in the arms of our best friend, we should not cry out, "Kill her!"—Allow me, Madame—my best regards!

ANTONIA

That makes no difference. You yourself confess you have presented only a hypothetical case.

CHÉRANGE

What of it, if by means of this hypothesis I can arrive at an original solution of a common case?

DAMORNAY

Besides, you have only put forth personal opinions.

CHÉRANGE

By no means: there are a great many young people who agree with me.

DAMORNAY

Do you represent the youth of France?

CHÉRANGE

Not all the youth, but the intellectual youth, I am sure.

[*He goes out.*

ANTONIA

An extraordinary little fellow!

LISTEL

He has a lot of intelligence.

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

And plenty of cheek!

MADAME SINNGLOTT

He's very young; how old is he?

ANTONIA

Not yet twenty-five. Only he has seen everything, read everything. He's quite a scholar—and he knows something else besides love affairs.

LISTEL

He will make his way in the world.

DAMORNAY

Yes, there are some like that. They know everything, they have dabbled in everything. I don't like the boy at all, he treated me like an old rag. Did you hear the way he spoke to me?

ANTONIA

As if he despised you. And what do you think of him, Monsieur Dembrun?

ROGER

I think that the young man said—rather paradoxically, of course—a great many true things.

DAMORNAY

I don't know about that, but I am sure he could have been answered in a dozen ways.

ANTONIA

However, you didn't think of one.

DAMORNAY

I was going to answer when he left. He must have realized that—he's very devious.

ROGER

He can assume a very unpleasant manner: and he poses, but that is only a sign of his extreme youth.

ANTONIA

Do you, too, despise women?

ROGER

Oh, no, but I firmly believe that the basis of women's demands—the equality of the sexes—is a great delusion. Things that are too different can never be equal: nature herself is against it. In attempting to do away with sexual contrast, which is the food of love, love itself will be stifled; we shall not only end in the death of gallantry but, which is far more serious, in the bankruptcy of love, and be plunged into a war of the sexes. In that war the women are bound to lose, for we all know how much physical strength counts for in the struggle of life.

MADAME SINNGLOTT

But love among women——

ROGER

Even then they would lose.

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

But somewhere between the equality of the sexes and the present inequality, Monsieur, you must admit there is a place for urgent reforms?

ROGER

By all means! The Code must be materially modified on your behalf, Mesdames, but the laws, even when they are modified, will still have nothing to do with matters of sentiment, with those mysterious attractions and repulsions of life; *there* the one who loves the less, man or woman, is master of the other.

ANTONIA

That's true.

ROGER

Even with our present Code there are men who abase themselves and ruin women, and there are unscrupulous and triumphant women who spread disaster about them. In such cases the law is helpless; we must educate and enlighten the soul. Occasionally the law is dangerous to honest people, and it is best to let it be—until we possess an ideal Code, without the margin. But when you speak of your servitude, Mesdames, you especially, we can only smile: you are free women! You understand, free? For the most part you are not slaves but mistresses, and we are infinitely tender toward you, respectful, devoted—and we pity you.

ANTONIA

Not all men are like you. Many, the great majority, are selfish and brutal masters.

ROGER

You must then find out whom you have to deal with; with husbands who don't beat and ruin you, behave

like free human beings—that is all we ask. Then indeed will the cause of Feminism have made real progress.

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

How true that is, Monsieur! Everywhere I go I hear so much about the frivolity and capriciousness of the French woman. It's unjust. Just as the fashions come from France, it seems as if vices have to go hand in hand with them; for in France everything is more elegant, more brilliant, more prettily cynical. We are overwhelmed with complaints about the morals of the middle classes and society—that is, the free women—when all the time the example should be set by the latter. Let *them* reform themselves first, and our cause and society at large will be much better off.

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

We are here ready to help you; it's a very interesting experiment.

MADAME SINNGLOTT

Oh, there is plenty to be said. (*To Antonia*) Good-by, Madame. I hope to see you soon again.

MADAME ROLLEBOISE

(*To Danglejais*) Good-by, Madame.

[*Madame Rolleboise and Madame Sinnglott go out.*

ANTONIA

How independent those little women are!

LISTEL

But they didn't say a thing. When they speak together their Feminism soars above the clouds.

DAMORNAY

Their husbands must be happy!

LISTEL

But they have no lovers.

DAMORNAY

(*Rising*) The family is going to ruin! Well, I must be going.

ANTONIA

Now that you've returned to Paris you must come to see me sometimes—I am at home every day at the same hour.

DAMORNAY

I shall come soon again.

[*He goes out.*

ANTONIA

Study him well, he belongs to a race that is fast disappearing: gentlemen.

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

He must have been a splendid specimen.

LISTEL

He is a type from another age; he has the fine manners of the old insurgent of '71, one of those who helped build barricades, and who now owns a château, pictures, collections.

ANTONIA

He used to be a delightful conversationalist. I find him much changed, older.

LISTEL

Do you know why? He is with a little girl whom he's madly in love with—extenuating circumstances.

ANTONIA

Who is she?

LISTEL

Fanny Louzy.

ANTONIA

I seem to remember the name. Didn't she use to sing somewhere?

LISTEL

Yes, she wanted to go on the stage—they are all smitten at that age. She had a wonderful act: two men from Lorraine and two from Brittany, old carollers for whom she had invented some silly songs. She called them "Rough Carols." "Rough," think of it! It's like—I don't know what—sheer nonsense!

ANTONIA

And Damornay swallowed the hook!

LISTEL

Regular Baron Hulot. Left his wife at once. If it continues much longer, he won't have a sou left when he dies. That is why he said that the family is going to ruin. And she is unfaithful to him! Once she lived at such a pace that it looked like the end—then he sent her to Mentone, and wrote four-page letters to her daily, paternal, full of sage advice, and she sent him telegraphic answers: "Zizi very good," or else "Little girl went to bed at nine."

ANTONIA

He must have been mad!

LISTEL

Indeed he was. Madame, I must say au revoir—(*To Madame Danglejais*)—Madame! (*To Roger*) Au revoir, Monsieur.

[*He goes out.*

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

Very amusing, isn't he?

ANTONIA

And he knows everything and everybody. (*To Roger*) I don't think you like him?

ROGER

No, I don't, he is a gossip, a scandal-monger; he collects stories and dispenses them carelessly, and on every occasion. Every evening, as he comes from the Bourse, he makes visits, and deals out his daily provision of stories and rigmaroles; fills his basket, which he empties to women of the streets, who in their turn empty their moral filth into him. I detest that sort of person.

ANTONIA

You are very severe.

ROGER

Not so much as I ought to be—don't defend him. I shall soon tell you why. (*A short pause*)

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

(*Quickly rising*) Good-by, dear.

ANTONIA

Good-by. I'm sorry we didn't have a second to talk to-day. But please drop in and have lunch with me some of these days. Just send me a line the day before.

MADAME DANGLEJAIS

I'll be glad to.

[*She goes out.*

ANTONIA

I'm very tired, and I have an awful headache!

ROGER

Did you have many guests to-day?

ANTONIA

One unending stream from five o'clock on. Isn't it absurd, our custom of receiving people for whom you don't care a bit, and who never utter anything but the commonest platitudes?

ROGER

But why must you do it?

ANTONIA

No one forces me, of course.

ROGER

And it will begin all over again to-morrow.

ANTONIA

Yes.—You're not at all sociable this evening. You've not even said How d'ye? (*She offers her cheek, which he kisses*) What a sad sort of kiss!

ROGER

I'm not feeling gay. I have bad news from my brother. I must leave.

ANTONIA

When?

ROGER

To-morrow night, at the latest.

ANTONIA

That's too bad!

ROGER

I must. Whom have you seen to-day?

ANTONIA

The people of course who were here when you arrived; then there was that little Madame Egreth, who left a moment before. That's all—and then, your friend Létang.

ROGER

I had a pleasant time with Listel at lunch to-day.

ANTONIA

Is that so? He didn't tell me.

ROGER

He must have forgotten.

ANTONIA

Where was it?

ROGER

At Letrivier's.

ANTONIA

I didn't know he knew Listel?

ROGER

He must.

ANTONIA

Hear anything interesting? It must have been lively if Listel was there.

ROGER

It was. You knew Listel in Edinburgh, didn't you?

ANTONIA

Yes, in Edinburgh. Why?

ROGER

It seems he was witness of a tragedy in which you were concerned, when you were in Scotland. You never told me about that. I've been learning things about you that are anything but pleasant.

ANTONIA

If people must tell things of that kind about me, I am surprised that they do so in your presence, and also that you would allow them to be repeated.

ROGER

I understand, but Listel was clever about it. To begin with, he pretended that there was not the slightest intimacy between you and me, so that he could say the vilest things in the most casual and off-hand

way. You know, you admire the way he handles things! Well, you can judge, by the way he speaks of other women, how he disposed of you. And he made no exception in your favor.

ANTONIA

Ha! I thought that Listel—there goes another illusion!

ROGER

Yes, every day brings its trouble.

ANTONIA

But you might at least have defended me as a friend —if you could not as a lover!

ROGER

Would it not have been tantamount to a confession if I had tried to muzzle that gossip? You know, in a certain class of society, even among the best in Paris, we don't try to defend our friends. That would stop all conversation, and simple friendship as an excuse in a gathering of that sort would scarcely prove valid. How many times have you put me on my guard against my compromising Don Quixotism? You are very particular about appearances, and out of consideration for——

ANTONIA

And then you were no doubt not at all sorry to learn what you did? You allowed him to continue, did you?—What did he say?

ROGER

Be patient. Do you remember, five months ago at Venice, one night when Pierre and Juliette were dining with you—you asked Listel, too; he left immediately after dinner.

ANTONIA

He was going to the Fenice—yes, I remember.

ROGER

That evening when we were alone you told me that you married very young; he was a man much older than you and you accepted him against your will. He mistreated you; then he met a tragic end; committed suicide during an attack of fever. Isn't that what you told me?

ANTONIA

Yes, that was what I told you.

ROGER

To-day I learned that Madame de Moldère is not your real name and that your husband is still living. You are not a widow, but a divorced woman, and the divorce was obtained at his instigation, because of certain things which you know as well as I.

ANTONIA

(*Haughtily*) Is that all?

ROGER

That is enough! I remember that evening in Venice, I recall every detail, even your very words: "Can one be gay in the presence of a sunset, or can one tell a lie in the melancholy splendor of sleeping Venice?" —And you did lie! Yet I asked nothing of you, you had only to remain silent. But no, you insisted on telling me your so-called story of your life—and what a story! You put out the lamp, took my hand in yours, and spoke in an undertone, in the dark.— You lied the way people confess.

ANTONIA

This is infamous! I won't answer you!

ROGER

You have nothing to say for yourself.

ANTONIA

I have, but I see it wouldn't do a particle of good to say it; you believe the libels of Listel and will refuse to believe me. Did Listel also tell you that he made violent love to me, that I refused to become his mistress, and that he invented that whole story merely out of revenge? I have a large packet of his letters in my desk—high as that! He implored me—I can show you——

ROGER

I know, I know.—Never mind.

ANTONIA

You know very well that the world makes a great deal out of the most harmless little adventure, and invents any number of versions of the story. One, for instance, is indulgent in tone, the others are more or less venomous. Without the slightest provocation you accept the least favorable. I might have expected that: you are my lover!

ROGER

Unfortunately for you, there were certain details, certain facts which were so precise that they could not have been invented.

ANTONIA

What can I do? No matter what I tell you now, you will refuse to believe. I told you that I had had a lover.

ROGER

Yes, but you told me that it was after your husband's death, while as a matter of fact he was the

cause of your divorce. Your husband is still living, too.

ANTONIA

He seems dead to me.

ROGER

Undoubtedly—and to me as well because I have never known him! But evidently you don't see the point; you don't answer my questions directly. You have no idea what rights you have, nor what duties. I know your husband was a good-for-nothing; that you had a lover was excusable, you were practically forced into it. That, I say, does not concern me. I have already told you that I consider I have no rights over your past, I asked nothing; but—and this I do blame you for—why did you lie, and arrange such a setting for the telling of your lies?—That makes it much worse.

ANTONIA

You are right; yet that evening I intended to tell you everything. I swear it, on my life! But somehow the moment I came to the point of confessing I was so ashamed——

ROGER

Why?

ANTONIA

Why! Because I love you, and I didn't have the courage. It's like people who decide to commit suicide: they take the revolver, put the barrel to their temple, but cannot pull the trigger. At that moment I invented some story or other. Yes, in the presence of the splendor of that serene night, I could not bare to you—even though it was in the past—a

soul that was not in harmony with our love and that city sleeping under a heaven sprinkled with stars.

ROGER

You wanted to confess in a beautiful setting. Only, after telling me that the night was too beautiful to lie, you tell me now that it was too beautiful not to have lied. You really must decide which it was!

ANTONIA

I know, it was not logical, but what had logic to do with it? Every woman would understand that! We are not altogether responsible when we are with the man we adore, and there are circumstances under which we tell not so much what has actually happened as what we wish might have happened.

ROGER

But what about me in all this?

ANTONIA

You are right, there are nuances which men cannot comprehend. I realize that you have no more faith in us; you see only lies, brutal infamous lies. You fail to inquire whether I was really to blame.—It was because I loved you too much!

[*She sobs quietly.*

ROGER

Yes, there are subtleties which are beyond me. But I understand your motives—I should not have done as you did, but I see how and why you behaved that way. There has been a tragedy in your life, a scandal, you were afraid I might hear of it some day—as I have—and in order to ward off the desire to ask you, you anticipated, and told me your own version, making your part as attractive as possible—naturally. That is the true explanation. But put your-

self in my place: imagine my coming from that lunch, absolutely dumbfounded! And remember that if you had not told me anything, these stories of Listel would not have troubled me in the least. Now I have to admit that stories to which only yesterday I should have turned a deaf ear, give me great anxiety, assume large proportions—that is what is irreparable.

ANTONIA

What did he tell you?

ROGER

Nothing—no, no!

ANTONIA

Listen to me: I promise not to interrupt. It was wrong of me, altogether wrong. I can see, too, how all this has hurt you. You must be suffering terribly, I know that, but never doubt for a second that I love you! Forget that night and remember only the other nights in Venice, and our summer in Brittany, and yesterday, here, what lovers we have been! Why should people meddle in our affairs! Can they never leave us in peace? The human race is disgusting; I detest society and loathe Paris. Let us go away for a few days, anywhere, alone, all alone. I need you near me, I must take you from this vile atmosphere! I want to see countries covered with snow! Norway must be magnificent in winter. The awful globe-trotters are there only in summer—will you?

ROGER

No. I leave to-morrow.

ANTONIA

I had forgotten. That's too bad! Where are you going?

ROGER

To Algiers; my brother is very sick. I had a letter from my sister-in-law, telling me to come—he wants to see me very much.

ANTONIA

Take me with you.

ROGER

Impossible, dearest. To begin with, the Mediterranean is very stormy just now, and then my brother lives in the country. They wouldn't be prepared—I should have to leave you at a hotel—that wouldn't be at all amusing for you.

ANTONIA

I'll be all alone. Will you be gone long?

ROGER

That depends.

ANTONIA

I see.—Listen to me: to-morrow you must lay aside all day and all this evening. I can't leave you now, and I want to be near you till the moment you go.

ROGER

Do you?

ANTONIA

I do. You'll take me to dinner somewhere, and then we'll go to hear some music. I must hear music with you. What is at the Opéra to-night? *La Juive?* No! Not that! At the Opéra-Comique? *Werther?* I prefer that! I'll go and get ready at once, and Rosalie shall telephone for a box.

[*She starts for her boudoir, as Mademoiselle Cendrier appears.*

MADEMOISELLE CENDRIER

Madame, I can do nothing with Mademoiselle Yvette. She clung to the bed curtains and then climbed up on top. I can't make her come down!

ANTONIA

The little demon!

MADEMOISELLE CENDRIER

And—I don't dare tell Madame—Madame will be very much put out.

ANTONIA

What else?

MADEMOISELLE CENDRIER

Mademoiselle Yvette broke those beautiful vases that were on the mantel.

ANTONIA

I'm so glad, they were atrocious! Wait a moment, I'll go myself.

[*Antonia goes out. While she is gone Roger sits down, takes up a book and finds among the leaves Pierre's photograph. A moment later Antonia reenters.*

ROGER

While you were gone I picked up a book to read. See what I found.

ANTONIA

Oh, yes, Pierre's picture.

ROGER

So I see, but how did it come here?

ANTONIA

Juliette came to see me the day before yesterday and left it.

ROGER

I didn't think you were in the habit of seeing Juliette?

ANTONIA

I don't officially. But sometimes, after lunch, she comes to see me.

ROGER

Indeed.

ANTONIA

What's the matter?

ROGER

I have been told that Létang was very much in love with you, and that he came here every day. Now I find his photograph—will you tell me——?

ANTONIA

Who told you that? Nonsense! He was here today; didn't I say so?

ROGER

You did.

ANTONIA

He came at five, and left at half past—Listel. and Madame Danglejais were here at the same time.

ROGER

Yet it is rather strange——?

ANTONIA

What's so strange? Juliette called on me the day before yesterday and left the picture. Take a cab, go and see her—she lives near here, Rue Copernic—and ask her. Juliette is Pierre's mistress, and she adores him. She has no interest in lying to save me. Only if you go don't take the trouble to come back.—I don't like that sort of scene. You see, if the most insignificant detail makes you so excited——

ROGER

You are mistaken—what scene am I making? I am very calm.

ANTONIA

That's worse still. You are calm because you are making a violent effort to remain calm.

ROGER

Precisely.

ANTONIA

You're pale and your lips are dry. Let me repeat: if the most insignificant detail makes you so excited, we had better make an end at once. This is simply ridiculous: my love for you always turns against me!

ROGER

Against you?

ANTONIA

Certainly. Juliette came the other day, showed me the photograph, which I thought a good one. I wanted to show it to you and then have you go to the same photographer. See how foolish I am—because I haven't a single nice picture of you. I don't know how you would pose—you always look like a policeman. (*He cannot keep from smiling*) Are you glad? Do you believe I am telling the truth?

ROGER

You speak as if you were. But truly you mustn't blame me too much. I'm very nervous and depressed. This lunch, and the telegram—a nasty day. Oh, I beg your pardon! Well, let us at least take this occasion to straighten matters out once for all. (*With deep feeling*) I love you, Antonia, but if you love me less or not at all, be frank, I beg you; it is your right—do you understand, your right?

ANTONIA

Why do you say that?

ROGER

Because I ought to tell you. If you speak loyally you will have nothing to fear from me. You are free to dispose of your body and your heart. By your position in society you are, you especially! a free woman! Don't resort to deceit and falsehood, they are the weapons of slaves! I understand that servitude and dissimulation are a part of the very blood that runs in the veins of women, but it rests with such women as you—superior women, you are called—to root out this evil heritage. You, you, Antonia, cannot lie like a common *bourgeoise* who deceives her husband, or a little grisette who wants to amuse herself from time to time while remaining with her "serious" lover.

ANTONIA

I adore you, I adore you—you have no idea how much I think of you! Hush now, you're too convincing a talker, and you'll make me say something foolish. In love only the foolish things are true and remain so!

ROGER

Quick, then, get dressed! Both of us need fresh air, and music!

ANTONIA

I shan't be long. (*She goes into her boudoir, the door of which she leaves open*) Rosalie, give me my mantle and my jet toque.

[*Still, Roger walks back and forth, a prey to thoughts easy to divine.*

ROGER

I must seem absurd to you!

ANTONIA

(*Still in her boudoir*) Absurd and charming. Yet you are by no means a fool, and you are so intelligent that if you wanted to be foolish you would be more absurd than anyone.—Come, Rosalie, quick!

ROGER

Well, when a man has had a dispute with his mistress, he asks himself whether he has been necessarily unjust or idiotically stupid—nasty alternative! Not at all convenient.

ANTONIA

If it were convenient, what would become of the farce?

ROGER

It is a quarter to eight and we haven't dined yet.

ANTONIA

(*Coming forth*) Whose fault is it? We'll have to miss the first act. This is the way people are always late to the theater!

[*They go out.*

CURTAIN

THIRD ACT

The study in Roger's home.

As the curtain rises Roger and Clémence, an old servant, are present. Roger sits at his desk opening mail.

CLÉMENCE

Did Monsieur have a pleasant trip?

ROGER

Yes, Clémence, as pleasant as possible under the sad circumstances.—Tell me, any news while I was away?

CLÉMENCE

A lady called—twice. She insisted so on seeing Monsieur that I told her Monsieur would return to-day at two o'clock. She's a very handsome lady, with such a sweet face!

ROGER

She gave no name, left no card? You should have asked her——

CLÉMENCE

I did, but she said it didn't matter. Will Monsieur have something to eat?

ROGER

No, thank you, Clémence, I had lunch on the train.

CLÉMENCE

And I put on the stew, in case Monsieur might like some bouillon.

ROGER

No, thanks!

CLÉMENCE

It's very good.

ROGER

No doubt.

CLÉMENCE

Too bad!

ROGER

Well, if you insist, bring me some tea.

CLÉMENCE

At once. I have some water boiling already. (*She goes out and returns a few moments later, carrying the tea*) And Monsieur's brother? How sad! How *could* it happen?

ROGER

Yes, Clémence, it is a great blow—he died just a week ago.

CLÉMENCE

And such a healthy man! What did he die of?

ROGER

For some time his heart had been troubling him, and you know he never took proper care of himself! He took cold baths in spite of the doctor's advice; three weeks ago he did this and had a stroke, was confined to his bed, then improved, and finally went from bad to worse.

CLÉMENCE

Did he suffer much?

ROGER

No—fortunately.

CLÉMENCE

Did he realize he was going to die?

ROGER

I don't think so, even though he was conscious to the end. Why, the day before he died he mentioned you to me.

CLÉMENCE

Is that so? My poor little Raymond; I was there when he was born—"my prince," as I called him! Did he speak of me?

ROGER

He remembered how he used to torment you when he was little.

CLÉMENCE

He was a little demon—and so intelligent! One day I asked him if he would invite me to his wedding, and he said: "No, I won't, you know people don't ask servants to weddings, only to funerals!" Oh, dear, I can't even go to his own funeral! (*She cries. A bell rings in the antechamber*) There's the bell, I'll open the door! (*She goes out and returns*) Monsieur, it's that lady.

ROGER

Ask her to come in. (*Clémence goes out and ushers in Juliette*) What! You, Juliette?

JULIETTE

Yes, it's I. How are you, Roger? I hope I'm not intruding? I called here twice while you were away. Your servant told me you would be home to-day at two. You were away to see your brother, weren't you? How is he?

ROGER

He is dead.

JULIETTE

You poor dear, I do sympathize with you!

ROGER

But how are you? And how is Pierre?

JULIETTE

Very well. I've come to ask a favor of you, or rather some advice, but——

ROGER

I am only too willing——

JULIETTE

It's this, then.—You'll not think me foolish? I'd like to work.

ROGER

Work? Why?

JULIETTE

First, in order to occupy myself—I get fearfully bored—then to make money, to make a living.

ROGER

You don't need to do that. What's the trouble? Is Pierre in financial straits? You know, of course, he can come to me!

JULIETTE

(*Quickly*) No, no, Pierre is all right so far as I know.

ROGER

Well, then, why do you have to make a living? Leave that to others who must. There are plenty of them!

JULIETTE

I know that, but I can't always count on Pierre. He might marry, and then—well, if we were ever, for one reason or another, to separate—separate, you know——?

ROGER

Yes?

JULIETTE

What was I saying?

ROGER

That if you were ever to——

JULIETTE

Oh, yes, well in that case I should have to have something I could depend upon, shouldn't I? You know, I'm not the sort of woman who has laid by annuities.

ROGER

I know that, still Pierre would never think of allowing you to go unprovided for. He is very generous, he would see to your future.

JULIETTE

Yes, but I couldn't think of accepting. I believe that in love there should be no indemnities; we have no right to a pension as old employees have. The invalids of a love affair——! Ridiculous!

ROGER

Well, then?

JULIETTE

I am looking for a position. There's nothing dishonorable in that, is there?

ROGER

Quite the contrary!

JULIETTE

Because I refuse to be driven to the streets, or be forced to rely on any man. I couldn't do that! I simply couldn't!

ROGER

There's no question of that!

JULIETTE

One never can tell. So I've come for your advice.

ROGER

Advice is very difficult to give. For instance, what do you want to do?

JULIETTE

I don't know—I think I'd like to go on the stage.

ROGER

The stage? Have you any idea what that means? You ought to, you have tried it before. A manager will give you two hundred francs a month and advise you to get some one to support you. If you don't want a man to support you, you'd better keep clear of the theater. No, not that!

JULIETTE

I might be a modiste?

ROGER

Too much competition. There are as many dressmakers as there are customers. Every time I hear a lady who is complimented on a dress say, "Yes, a little dressmaker of mine made it!" I see a room at the back of a courtyard, without air, without light, where the little dressmaker is starving in order to make pretty gowns at starvation wages for the beautiful lady.

JULIETTE

Then what can I do? Can't you think of anything else?

ROGER

Yes, I know of a very good position for a woman, at a hundred and fifty francs a month. There is an old lady, very good and charitable; she is an invalid and requires a secretary to visit her poor. It's a wearisome job, climbing stairs and all that; but the lady is so charitable, she has so many miserable wretches

to relieve, that her secretaries don't object to the drudgery. She has already had three; two fell sick, but the other—who was wiser—gave it up at the end of two weeks. She preferred the old gentlemen to the old lady. And yet she is a very kind and considerate old lady, and believes that she pays a generous salary. A hundred and fifty francs a month—that's the sort of position you can find!

JULIETTE

Then for a woman like me there remains only suicide or a lover?

ROGER

Yes—but you haven't got that far yet. Why worry, so long as Pierre——?

JULIETTE

That's so.

ROGER

By the way, I was going to ask you: did you leave a photograph at Madame de Moldère's? I saw it there—— You don't seem to know what I refer to? Just before I went away I found a book at Antonia's, I happened to open it, and found a photograph of Pierre. She said you left it for her to show me. (*He looks at her intently*) You didn't?

JULIETTE

(*Bursting into sobs*) No, I didn't!

ROGER

She is his mistress, isn't she?

JULIETTE

Yes, she is.

ROGER

Are you sure? Positive?

JULIETTE

Am I sure! Listen to me: I followed Pierre one day —he sees Madame de Moldère at Number Seventeen, Rue de Balzac, first floor. He rented the apartment under an assumed name.

ROGER

My God!

[*He falls into a chair.*

JULIETTE

I beg your pardon, it was wrong of me to tell you. And—and I shouldn't have cried like a little schoolgirl. But I couldn't help it!

ROGER

No, no, it was right, don't feel badly about it. You were right, and I thank you, only, wait—I was so overcome—— Never mind, I prefer the truth to that awful doubt I've felt ever since I discovered her first lie. That doubt clung to me, even at my brother's bedside, and I asked myself: "Where is she? What is she doing?" Now it's all over, I feel strong now, I can face her when she comes—she *is* coming, any moment now. The first thing I saw when I returned was a charming note from her, so loving and tender! When I was away I telegraphed her that my brother was dead. She wrote me wonderful letters! Here, read!

[*He takes some letters from his pocket and hands them to Juliette.*

JULIETTE

(*Refusing to take them*) No.

ROGER

Yes, do, they are worth the trouble. (*She takes them*) Unbelievable, isn't it? Wouldn't the most

suspicious of mortals be deceived? Now she is coming; she will pretend to be the same as ever. How much will you wager that she won't be in deep mourning? She will console me, act the mother to me, her sincerity will be written all over her face. What a farce!

[*He strikes the table, breaking the cup into which Clémence had poured the tea.*

JULIETTE

(*Starting*) Did you hurt yourself?

ROGER

A little cut. Poor little tea cup, it's not your fault. Do you know what that is?

[*He points to the fragments.*

JULIETTE

(*Who has been rather frightened*) No.

ROGER

A very old cup. My mother and grandmother served bouillon in that cup at their respective wedding banquets—charming old custom. For the last ten years Clémence has served my tea in it every morning. Now it's broken. But it can't blame me, for these old familiar things pity us. If this cup could speak it would say: "Did you hurt yourself, my child?"

JULIETTE

Roger!

ROGER

Don't be afraid, I'm not mad, I'm not, truly! Now let's talk about you. What's to become of you? Of course, you're not with Pierre?

JULIETTE

Oh, no! The moment I had absolute proof that he was unfaithful to me, I couldn't stay a second lon-

ger; that very evening I left. I had felt for a long time that he was changed, that I bored him. Ever since Venice he was different, but he didn't want to say anything to me about it, yet it wasn't my fault——

ROGER

How is that?

JULIETTE

I always kept telling him: "If you don't love me any more, if you've had enough of me, tell me. I'll go—no trouble at all—I'll kill myself."

ROGER

Did you say that?

JULIETTE

Yes, but you know how weak he is! He swore he loved me. You were speaking of your doubts just now. Ha! For a whole year—ever since that scene in the studio—he told you about that? when I shot him? Well, I was wrong to forgive him, for ever since I've doubted and been so suspicious! It's been worse than agony for me. It has been one long series of tortures. I haven't been able to think of another thing. My heart beats till I think it must surely burst—just as if I were living at a furious rate, while I wasn't really living at all! Yes, you were right just now, it's better to know the truth, no matter how shocking it is, and be sure that it is the truth! It's a relief, something soothing, almost a consolation.

[*She cries.*

ROGER

It is, a great consolation. (*He wipes his eyes, trying*

to hide his tears from her) We *do* look like people who are consoled! What is going to become of you?

JULIETTE

I don't know, I don't know! That's why I came for advice. But you say I can't do anything!

ROGER

Did Pierre let you go, this way, without——?

JULIETTE

No, I must do him justice: he offered to give me anything I wanted, but I've just told you how I felt about that.

ROGER

I can understand your delicacy—it's so rare! Yet I see no reason why you shouldn't have accepted something, without any scruples about it. You are no longer very young, and you have no means of support.

JULIETTE

Oh, I have a little—a good deal in fact, and I needn't save it, for I'm not going to wait till it is gone.

ROGER

What do you mean?

JULIETTE

Look at me. I'm not joking, I tell you in all seriousness: I am going to kill myself. I've had enough of this!

ROGER

You won't do anything foolish like that!

JULIETTE

It's very easy.—The old spirit lamp of our mothers; I don't care about being original. It's just like a little shopgirl, but I don't want to suffer. You just go to sleep and don't wake up—it's so easy!

ROGER

You are not old! Think, you have all your life before you—you will get over this, you will forget!

JULIETTE

Do you think I could forget?

ROGER

Of course, and then some day you will find a fine man who will love you as you deserve to be loved. You have a very tender heart——

JULIETTE

Much good has it done me! No, I think that that is another reason why I can never be happy. Then—I always told Pierre I should kill myself.

ROGER

Is that any reason why you should keep your word? I know very well you told him that, and yet you wonder why he was never frank with you! You must confess it was hard for him, in the face of all your threats; he didn't care to feel responsible for your death—think of the responsibility! He wanted to—to conciliate your happiness and his own; it's the same old story. Yes, you were wrong to tell him, and you would be still more in the wrong to carry out your threats. To begin with, you haven't the right, no, you haven't the right.

JULIETTE

But it's my affair, mine alone.

ROGER

You mustn't be selfish; think of others.

JULIETTE

I have no relatives; I'm all alone.

ROGER

You don't understand. I mean, think of all the other women in your situation. You have no right to give them a bad example, a contagious example. Yes, contagious: for your suicide would have consequences you never dream of, make no mistake about that. Other women who have been abandoned, poor girls who might otherwise have found consolation elsewhere, will follow in your steps. You have no right to swell the number of sensational paragraphs in the newspapers, and allow your example to lead other love affairs to so tragic an end. Think of your own responsibility—do you see?

JULIETTE

Yes, I see. You have said what a person who doesn't suffer would say to one who does. I should like to see you in the same situation!

ROGER

You'd like to see me——? But, my dear Juliette——!

JULIETTE

That's so! My dear Roger, forgive me! I wasn't thinking of you—only of myself. Please forgive me.

ROGER

It's so natural! But do you think I don't suffer? Do you think I find life sweet now, and humanity pleasant to think about? No, indeed. Do you imagine I have any desire to live? If I wanted to do something, could I not choose any of a number of violent means? I could go to Pierre and challenge him—but I know it's not his fault, poor fellow! He didn't take her, she allowed herself to be taken! And as for her, I might—— But no, I refuse to do it,

for all those reasons I told you. If I find I am going to suffer too cruelly, I'll go away to peace and solitude, live with nature where all sorrows mingle and disappear, because our greatest sorrows are our smallest, and the tiniest corner in the country is plenty large enough. Now she may come; I feel strong, sure of myself, as sure as anyone could feel under the circumstances. You have done that. When I tried to save you, I saved myself. Ah, Juliette, you are not an "intellectual," and you are not a revolutionary, but you are simple, admirable, you have all the weakness of women, but at the same time all their grandeur.

JULIETTE

I am a poor little woman, but you are good—I have confidence in you!

ROGER

Then promise me not to do anything foolish.

JULIETTE

I can't promise anything; I don't care about life any longer.

ROGER

Remember all I have told you; when you think it over well, I am sure you will be reasonable. At least, promise to come back here the day after to-morrow. Promise.

JULIETTE

I'll do that, I promise. I'm too curious to know what happens about Antonia.

ROGER

See, you still have some interest in life? By the way, have I your permission to tell Antonia that I got my information from you?

JULIETTE

Surely.

ROGER

Now, go. There's no use in your meeting her. Au revoir—I'll see you the day after to-morrow. You've promised?

JULIETTE

I have.

[*They shake hands cordially, and Juliette goes out. Roger rings and Clémence comes in.*

CLÉMENCE

Did Monsieur ring?

ROGER

Yes. Here, Clémence, take that away.

CLÉMENCE

Oh, Monsieur has broken that pretty cup!

ROGER

(*Impatiently*) Yes, yes, I have broken the pretty cup! Hurry, now!

CLÉMENCE

(*As she gathers up the fragments in her apron*) I heard Monsieur just now, he was talking so loud! That awful woman made Monsieur very angry! I know I oughtn't to've told her when Monsieur was coming home. But I *was* suspicious of her. I couldn't ever remember what her face was like!

ROGER

Quick, now, Clémence, and don't talk so much. You don't know what you're saying. Now leave me.

CLÉMENCE

Tut, tut, now—I'm going.

[*She goes out. When he is alone Roger walks about, re-reading Antonia's letters. Then a bell rings in*

the ante-chamber. Clémence opens the door and announces:

CLÉMENCE

Monsieur, it's Madame de Moldère.

ROGER

Ask her to come in.

[*Antonia enters, dressed in mourning.*

ANTONIA

It's I. Were you expecting me?

ROGER

Yes. I found your note when I arrived.

ANTONIA

(*Looking at him*) My poor dear, how pale you are! You look so tired!

ROGER

I am tired, very; and it's so sad outdoors, so cold!

ANTONIA

Let me warm you!

ROGER

I need it!

ANTONIA

I've thought of you often, especially after I heard the sad news. How I wanted to be at your side! The death of dear ones is frightful. They seem to grasp your hand and want to take you with them. But at such moments we feel the need of some one else to take the other hand, take it in a hand that is not cold, but warm with tenderness. Mine should have held yours!

ROGER

Yes.

ANTONIA

You were so far away, so far, and I could only write to you. We can make pen and ink tell so little of what we feel!

ROGER

Your letters were wonderful!

ANTONIA

Wonderful, no! Merely a sweetheart's letters!

ROGER

That is what I meant.

ANTONIA

But here you are, and now we can suffer together. I can't think what sort of life I led with you away! I saw absolutely no one. Sometimes, in the afternoon, I rode in the Bois, by the side of our melancholy little lake. I never went out at night; I stayed home and played *Werther* on the piano. That reminded me of the evening we were together, just before you went away. I imagined I was still at your side. I used to play the part we love.

[*She plays that section of the opera which is marked on page 62 of the score, "lent, très calme et contemplatif," as far as "Charlotte et Werther paraîssent à la porte du jardin." Meantime, Roger looks intently at her, then touches her lightly on the shoulder.*

ROGER

Stop! You're tired!

ANTONIA

No, I'm not. Why do you say that, dearest?

ROGER

Because I pity you. I might let you go on that way

indefinitely—you would play the whole score. I feel sorry for you.

ANTONIA

(*Surprised*) I—I—I don't understand.

ROGER

You will. You did not *only* go to the Bois during my absence, by our little melancholy lake! Didn't you also go to Seventeen, Rue de Balzac?

ANTONIA

(*Rising*) Why, yes, I did.

ROGER

What were you doing there?

ANTONIA

I shan't answer. You've spied on me, as if I were a servant!

ROGER

When a woman like you lies like the worst of servants one has the right, I should think, to have her followed.

ANTONIA

I can see no excuse for it.

ROGER

Yes, I know, I know! A man is always a brute when he uses your own weapons against you—and in the same identical circumstances. But all that is at an end; now it's time to change. As a matter of fact, I did not have you followed; I don't do things like that. I did not have to look for proofs of your unfaithfulness, they have been brought to me. You knew that sooner or later bad news would come without looking for it. It was Juliette, who just left here, who followed Pierre; she saw him enter number seventeen, Rue de Balzac, an apartment where

you met him. (*A long pause*) Why did you do that? When I found that photograph at your home the night before I left, which you told me Juliette loaned you in order that I might see, you told one of those classic lies which any woman would have told under the circumstances. The fact that I found a photograph at your home which you tried to hide, put me in the wrong. I took the offensive, and you defended yourself as best you could. You couldn't then and there have told me that you loved my friend; I surely couldn't have asked that! You were far too compromised to admit that. But when I asked you whether you didn't love me any more, why did you insist, and so passionately? Why did you still play the ghastly comedy?

ANTONIA

What!

ROGER

Yes, comedy. It's astonishing how words seem to shock you. That's precisely the word. Yet I explained that it was your right not to love me any longer; you knew very well that you had nothing to fear from me—anger, spite, revenge. Why didn't you tell me? It was so simple. Ha, ha! It was too simple! Why, if the man you no longer love doesn't turn into a poor devil on his knees before you, or a ferocious beast, you think you haven't succeeded! Your rôle didn't satisfy you! The prospect of a separation without tears and screams—in other words, without a drama, didn't appeal to you. My resignation offended you.

ANTONIA

Stop it! You don't know what you're saying. I

know what your resignation is. You think I like dramas, but I've had enough in my life. You are very clever at explaining what went on in my mind—I know that better than you, perhaps, and I tell you you are sadly mistaken. I did not think of myself then, I thought of you.

ROGER

You were sorry for me.

ANTONIA

Yes, I was sorry for you, and afraid for you——

ROGER

Go on.

ANTONIA

That you might suffer too much.

ROGER

Even if I were to die, that would not be your affair.

ANTONIA

But——

ROGER

No, it was not your affair. It was mine, and mine alone. So much the worse for the vanquished.

ANTONIA

Now you're talking nonsense. I'll grant you were sincere when you told me of your resignation, but if I had told you then that my heart belonged to some one else——

ROGER

Your heart! Ha!

ANTONIA

You see, you would have raged about, cried—your vanity would have suffered—look at you now!

ROGER

(*Angrily*) I have no pride; I've often told you that. Let the whole world know what sort of woman you are, how can that affect me? You seem to triumph over me because I am angry, but what makes me, if you want to know, is the way you came in just now: your mourning, *Werther*, your letters I was re-reading before you came, that you had the impudence to write and that I read so lovingly, while you were in the Rue de Balzac with Pierre, making fun of me, perhaps! I was ridiculous, wasn't I? To love you, have faith in you, at the precise moment when you were saying the same burning words to him, while you were in his arms, while you were all to him that you had once been to me!

ANTONIA

No, no, that's not true! It's not true!

ROGER

Oh, you deserve——!

[*He takes her by the throat and throws her brutally to the floor.*

ANTONIA

Kill me! You have the right!

ROGER

(*Releasing his hold*) No, I haven't the right. Don't tempt me. Now go. I was mad—good God! Go.

[*A pause.*

ANTONIA

(*Going to him*) Roger.

ROGER

Yes?

ANTONIA

You despise me.

ROGER

No, I don't despise you. Now it's all over. I don't hate you, and I'm not angry. Oh, if you had only been open with me when I asked you to, I might have been your friend, or if I could not have been sure of myself as a friend, I should at least have been able to keep a tender memory. Now I ask only to forget.

ANTONIA

You blame me for not having told you that I loved another man, but what could I do? I didn't love him, and I never loved anyone but you, you alone, do you hear? No? Then, if I didn't love you, why did I stay with you, alone in the country, for a whole summer, seeing only you, and feeling so lonely when you happened to be away for an hour? Why did you make me so much your own that we thought the same thoughts, and often said the same things? Why did the most commonplace incidents that had to do with you make me cry? I loved you like a child; you know that—but you were in reality my master. You don't remember those nights in Venice when I was so pale you thought I was going to die! And here, too, how often I came, intending to stay only five minutes, and we were together for hours, saying profound nothings! The darkness came and covered us, and we clung to each other desperately. There are at least certain *things* that don't lie!

ROGER

(*Dryly*) And where does Pierre come in?

ANTONIA

I don't know. Don't mention his name to me! I'm ashamed of myself and horrified at him. That's over with, all over, I swear——

ROGER

Why did it ever begin?

ANTONIA

Why? Why? I don't know.

ROGER

But if you love me as you say you do, I implore you to be frank. Why did you consent to become his mistress?

ANTONIA

Don't ask me—I don't know. (*She tries to find words to describe her sensations*) Something unconscious, irresistible, impelled me, it was like a whirlwind—and curiosity, yes, that's it—I think—it's mad, absurd, I don't dare tell you now. Don't look at me like that. My God, how ashamed I am! Because Juliette—— You know, in the studio—because she fired on him!

ROGER

This time you have told the truth. If such an incident, which is more absurd than tragic, can affect you in that way and make you quite mad, then you're not in the least interesting. You remind me of a barmaid I once knew a long time ago, in the Latin Quarter. She fell in love with a friend of mine because he didn't smoke his cigarettes down to the tip. He took two or three puffs and then threw the cigarette away. For that woman, it was a touch of the Orient. You're offended, but the cases are similar. One man appeals to you because his mistress fired on him, another because he fired on his mistress, a third because—I don't know. And when you are troubled, you must have the man who causes you the trouble. *You must*, because, in the case of women

like you, the heart, brain, and the rest, are so intimately connected with one another, that really I doubt whether you can distinguish them. In order to satisfy your curiosity, your caprice, you lie, deceive, try to brave it out, behave like the lowest of street walkers—yes, you, Antonia—— And so you dance through life, depending only on your sensations, your self.

ANTONIA

Self-dependence is sometimes the worst sort of dependence.

ROGER

So it seems! You poor free woman, you are a sentimental weathercock!

ANTONIA

(*Kneeling*) You have the right to talk to me that way. You hate me, you mistreat me, and yet I admire you, I adore you, I feel instinctively that you are my master. That's the truth, the sad truth. I loved you always, but my heart was like a piece of changing silk, and when *he* was there, I felt troubled! You shouldn't have left me alone! Why didn't you take me with you? I asked you to.

ROGER

But——

ANTONIA

(*Tearfully*) I'm a poor silly creature, I'm weak, easily influenced. I'm so sorry—I was just caught up and whirled on and on. I'm terribly ashamed! You can't leave me! I don't know what to do! Pity me, you must direct me, you alone can cure me, save me from myself. Don't condemn me——!

ROGER

I don't condemn you. But you must let some one else cure you, bring you back to yourself. It is not my place to do that. To begin with, I cannot—I know too much, I know you too well. Begin again a life with you and be tormented by suspicions and doubts? That would be a living hell! No, I cannot! Now you must go.

ANTONIA

You won't have to suspect anything now—you can take me some place far away. I want only you. We'll live in some solitary little place.

ROGER

Could I, even in the desert, keep from imagining things and being tormented? My imagination is too well trained.

ANTONIA

(*At Roger's feet*) Then—it's all over with me! This is frightful. I can't live without you, I can't! Don't go away, don't leave me! You mustn't! Why didn't you kill me just now—I shouldn't have had to suffer this! Now what can I do?

ROGER

(*Gently disengaging himself*) Please! Leave me! I have already told you: this is over. It was altogether too easy, what you suggested. You sow disaster everywhere you go—ruin lives. You've separated Pierre and Juliette, and now you leave *him*. People suffer because of you; one woman wants to die. And you merely say your heart is like a piece of changing silk! If everything turned out well, it would not be fair. You see, I'm not angry in the

least, but I have no pity, and—*I do not believe you!* Leave me.

ANTONIA

When I'm dead, then you will believe me!

[*She clings desperately to him.*

ROGER

Stop it! If you refuse to go, I will. Good-by!

ANTONIA

Roger! Roger!

[*She screams and falls fainting to the sofa. During this last scene it has become dark. Clémence runs in carrying a lamp which illumines the stage.*

CLÉMENCE

What's the matter? Lord in Heaven, the poor lady! She's dead!

ROGER

Don't shout like that—stop it! No, she is not dead —only look after her. Run for some vinegar, water, salts—I don't care——!

CLÉMENCE

What's the matter with her? How pale she is!

ROGER

(*Putting on his hat and gloves*) I think she's fainted.

[*He goes out.*

CURTAIN

THEY!

(Eux!)

A SAYNÈTE

(1889)

THEY!

A drawing-room in the Hôtel Cosmopolite, furnished in the Japanese style. The furniture is upholstered with bright-colored goods, richly embroidered in fantastic designs. Silk lanterns, covered with drawings of animals and flowers, are hung about the room. Down stage to the right is a low and rather long sofa; behind it is a large bouquet of various-colored chrysanthemums in a vase. There are doors to the left, the right, and at the back.

As the curtain rises Hélène enters from the right, in her wedding dress. She carries a bouquet of orange blossoms. She is addressing her husband, who remains in the outer hallway.

HÉLÈNE

No, please—leave me alone. I want no one, not even you! It's only a headache—let me rest—only fifteen minutes—a quarter of an hour! (*She waves to him, then sits down on the sofa*) At last! Here at least, I can pull myself together. What a nerve-racking day! How commonplace weddings are! First the church, the torture while waiting in the sacristy, then the lunch——! And to-night, the Hôtel Cosmopolite, of course! After the dinner for the relatives, a ball for the friends! All this excitement, and all these people I don't care a snap for—how dif-

ferent from the romance I once dreamed of! The private Mass at midnight in the family chapel, the priest's intimate and invigorating sermon—the dear priest who knew you as a child—then to fall into your lover's arms, with no other witnesses of your happiness than the trees of the old park, and the moonlight that follows you as if you were a fairy princess——! Ah!

[*Achille rises from behind the chrysanthemums, which have concealed him.*

ACHILLE

I, too, have dreamed of a wedding less banal, Madame. My spirit, nourished on the essence of antiquity, thirsted to roam the streets of Paris, sunlit like some ancient city of Attica, beneath a canopy of sparkling azure! Slaves dressed in short robes, with long flowing hair, would have marched before us, bearing symbolic torches—— Pray don't be alarmed, I'm not a house-breaker; I have a bride waiting for me in the next room—then behind, a long line of men and women, garbed in lily-white gowns, pink gowns, hyacinth gowns, crying, "Hymen! Hymen!"

HÉLÈNE

(*Interrupting*) Good-by, Monsieur.

[*She rises, makes for the door at the right, and goes out. But she forgets her bouquet on the sofa.*

ACHILLE

Are you going so soon? Stay—only for a moment! You surely have time? (*After Hélène has disappeared*) Ah, women are all alike! I heard her dream, all of it: the family chapel, the old priest, and the moonlight. I did not interrupt her, *I* at

least was polite. I waited until the end, and when I wanted to tell her my dream, which is undeniably more antique—"Good-by, Monsieur!" (*He catches sight of the bouquet on the sofa*) Ah! She forgot it! And on this of all nights! How stupid! (*He starts to put the bouquet in a vase, when Hélène re-enters.*

HÉLÈNE

I beg your pardon, Monsieur, but I think I left——

ACHILLE

(*Giving her the bouquet*) Here, Madame. As I was not sure when you would return, I took the liberty of putting them in water.

HÉLÈNE

(*Confused*) Really, Monsieur, you are too kind! Good-by, Monsieur.

ACHILLE

Believe me, Madame, your precipitous exit is a poor way to thank me. But I understand: I must have seemed quite mad a moment ago?

HÉLÈNE

I don't say that.

ACHILLE

Vulgar?

HÉLÈNE

Oh, no!

ACHILLE

Then—charming?

HÉLÈNE

No—extraordinary, that's all.

ACHILLE

I was waiting for that! Extraordinary. Now, after

what has happened, you have a right to know my story.

HÉLÈNE

But, Monsieur, I really don't think——

ACHILLE

Oh, you need have no apprehension. I shall tell it, none the less, because *I insist.* (*Hélène tries to go, but he detains her*) You see, you thought you were speaking to yourself a few minutes ago. I learned that you were a sort of victim—(*She sighs*) You see, you are suffering? Tell me your troubles, it will relieve you to have them shared.

HÉLÈNE

I have nothing to tell you, Monsieur. You are taking advantage of our chance meeting which—which I have surely not sought. If I spoke of certain things—personal matters, I had no idea you were listening—and now you ask me to make you my confidant!

ACHILLE

But I did not come here to listen to you, Madame! I came here before you, in order to escape from my wedding, which is now taking place next door to your own. Mine got on my nerves—just like yours! Curiosity does not draw me to you, but a great bond of sympathy, a sudden and deep-rooted interest. We need no introduction: you are the bride next door, I am the bridegroom next door. You suffer. So do I. We come together this evening, like two wounded soldiers on the field of battle. You are married to a man you detest——

HÉLÈNE

Detest? That's saying a great deal—we—we have little in common, that's all.

ACHILLE

Same thing.

HÉLÈNE

My husband, M. Desbarres——

ACHILLE

What! Are you marrying Desbarres?

HÉLÈNE

Yes, do you know him?

ACHILLE

Never heard of him, but I believe it, since you tell me.

HÉLÈNE

My husband, M. Desbarres, is like so many men nowadays: horribly material, without an ideal in him. See how unhappy I'm bound to be, for I'm very romantic and sentimental. I'm telling you all this because I know you will understand. I'm so poetic, it's really a disease. I've caught poetry!

ACHILLE

A case of galloping poetry!

HÉLÈNE

That's it. So bad a case that on Spring mornings in the country, when I sit at the piano, I open wide all the windows so that the birds in the trees may sing and accompany me.

ACHILLE

Very pretty—why, a music publisher ought to display in his window: "*Pink Dreams and White Lilacs, easy transcription for the piano and goldfinch.*"

HÉLÈNE

(*Understood at last*) So he ought! How good you are! I am an Autumn woman: everything that is vague, floating, unreal, attracts me and enchants me; all the tints, the minors. Don't be surprised if you find me sad. You know, I should have married a poet endowed with subtle feelings; instead, I have taken a vulgar merchant. My whole life is broken, like the celebrated vase——

ACHILLE

Where dies the famous verbena. Ah, Madame, how fortunate it is we have met. I had already guessed what you have just told me.

HÉLÈNE

Now say it's commonplace!

ACHILLE

No, only I could foresee it. I am so happy about it all! *

HÉLÈNE

You're not very kind.

ACHILLE

No, I am happy because I find in you a sister soul for my own. For long I cried aloud in the solitude: Spirit, Sister-spirit, art thou at last come? And here you are!

HÉLÈNE

But I'm going.

ACHILLE

No! You wouldn't do that?

HÉLÈNE

I must. Think of it—the ceremony is about to take place—in there! My husband will be very uneasy.

* An untranslatable pun on *"Verveine"* and *"Veine."*

ACHILLE

Desbarres is not a man to be uneasy. And he wouldn't leave without you.

HÉLÈNE

But if we were seen——?

ACHILLE

Then it could be said that a most extraordinary thing was witnessed!

HÉLÈNE

Truly, Monsieur, that doesn't seem a sufficient reason.

ACHILLE

But there is no danger. You will notice that at a ceremony of this sort there are always two kinds of guests: the husband's friends, who don't know the bride, and the bride's friends who don't know the groom. So that, if one of my guests sees us, he will take you for the bride, if one of yours, he will take me for your bridegroom.

HÉLÈNE

No: my bride!

ACHILLE

Yes, my bridegroom. No, I said *your* bridegroom!

HÉLÈNE

Oh, yes, *my* bridegroom!

ACHILLE

That's so.

HÉLÈNE

Good-by.

ACHILLE

No, Madame, you can't leave me this way. You have told me your story, but I haven't told you mine.

HÉLÈNE

I am willing to call it even.

ACHILLE

No, no, Madame. No, I shouldn't like to have people who meet me in the streets saying: "There's the man—notice, the *man*—who was told a story, and didn't tell one in return!"

HÉLÈNE

You needn't fear—I shall never tell anyone about this.

ACHILLE

That is no way to excuse yourself. I promise it shan't take long.

HÉLÈNE

(*Firmly*) Quite useless, I tell you.

ACHILLE

Very well, I shall follow you if you refuse to listen to me here, and tell everything in the midst of the ceremony. You little know me!

HÉLÈNE

Well then, tell me, but be quick about it!

ACHILLE

(*Motioning her to a chair*) The man before you, Madame, came out first from the *Ecole polytechnique.*

HÉLÈNE

(*Quietly ironical*) Of course.

ACHILLE

Why "of course"?

HÉLÈNE

Everyone knows that two hundred students come out first from the *Ecole polytechnique.* Read a few novels, and you will learn that.

ACHILLE

When I say I came out first, I mean I came out before the others, a long time before—I was expelled two months after I entered. Now you will understand that I am not bragging: if I showed some opposition to authority and dislike for the abstract and positive sciences, it was not through inability on my part.

HÉLÈNE

(*Amiably*) I don't doubt it for a single instant: you do exactly what you please.

ACHILLE

Absolutely. I am like you, a being of dreams and clouds. In a word, Madame, I am a poet.

HÉLÈNE

(*Overwhelmed*) A poet?

ACHILLE

Who is heartbroken to have met you too late.

HÉLÈNE

I see: you are not marrying the lady of your dreams?

ACHILLE

No.

HÉLÈNE

Yet you were master of your own destiny. You weren't, like me, a young girl surrounded by a wall of prejudices and family conventions! When such as I give their hand in marriage, we are oftener than not forced to do so—but men! Then you have experience and initiative, while we——

ACHILLE

I too, alas, was like you, Madame, imprisoned within a wall of prejudices and family conventions. Of course, I could see where I was going, better perhaps

than you, but—while you're making love you don't see the danger, you can't realize the horror of the situation. Then you always console yourself with the hope that the fatal day will never come. But it does, and in the face of the unspeakably brutal reality, stripped bare of fancy, you are struck dumb——

HÉLÈNE

(*Pensively*) Like a nightingale! Yes, the mayor fulfills his gratuitous but frightful functions here below. Not at all like a dentist, for before you go to *him* you know what a toothache you have.

ACHILLE

(*Dreamily*) Toothache—heartache——

HÉLÈNE

How I pity you, Monsieur! (*She rises*) Now I simply must go; everything is ready for the ceremony in the next room. Now I have to leave you—with infinite regret.

[*She sits down again.*

ACHILLE

And is there no hope?

[*He takes her hand.*

HÉLÈNE

Alas!

[*A short pause.*

ACHILLE

I am dreaming: you are my wife, at my side all the livelong day. Like you, she is all in white.

HÉLÈNE

I am dreaming: you are my husband, at my side all the livelong day. Like you, he is all in black.

ACHILLE

At your side I seem to hear the wedding Mass, at the *Trinité!* Talazac is singing the *O salutaris,* and Johannes Wolff playing the violin. Then we walk from the altar, while the organ plays the wedding march——

HÉLÈNE

Mendelssohn's.—Just like mine! At your side I seem to hear the wedding Mass. Talazac is singing the *O salutaris* and Johannes Wolff playing the violin——

ACHILLE

At what church?

HÉLÈNE

Notre-Dame-de-Lorette.

ACHILLE

Good! The same artists—and it's only a step: Gare de l'Est-Trocadéro 'bus—they got there at once.

HÉLÈNE

Strange.—And after the Mass, the lunch at my mother's.

ACHILLE

Lunch after the Mass at my mother-in-law's. And this evening, Hôtel Cosmopolite!

HÉLÈNE

The dream continues—the nuptial feast——

ACHILLE

Same menu, I'll wager? (*Both take menus from their pockets and read*) *Bisque renaissance.*

HÉLÈNE

Truite saumonée.

ACHILLE

Sauce vénitienne?

HÉLÈNE

Vénitienne!

ACHILLE

Quartier de marcassin à la Nesselrode. Poulardes——

HÉLÈNE

A la Wagram.

ACHILLE

Wagram. Marquise au kirsch.

HÉLÈNE

Bombe Dame-Blanche.

ACHILLE

Gateau Trois-Frères.

ACHILLE AND HÉLÈNE

(*Together and very rapidly*) *Corbeilles de fruits, bonbons, petits fours!*

ACHILLE

(*Throwing himself at Hélène's feet*) Oh, I love you! [*He takes her hands in his.*

HÉLÈNE

What are you doing?

ACHILLE

You are my wife! Yes, I love you! Be kind to me. —Let your right hand not know what your left does!—The dream continues: I have found you this evening, and you are all in white.

HÉLÈNE

And you, like *him*, are all in black.

ACHILLE

Ah, one wedding resembles another——

HÉLÈNE

Just as one funeral does another——

ACHILLE

Or one cold bath another. If you had only married me, how happy we should have been! By now we should have been far, far away—in a little white cottage in the depth of a wood! The long walks we should have had together, our undying love, one long waking dream, a living dream——

[*He declaims:*

Come, let us be mad, dear, fantastic and blue!
Your happiness, dreamed as a child, has come true!
Your beauty, your love never-ending will teach
The two of us lessons 'neath willow and beech!
I'll take you, my dearest, without your trousseau!
Ah, realized dream! How like Jean-Jacques Rousseau!

[*She rises.*

We'll eat bread and milk, and take care of the poor,
And protect the sweet flowers; you'll like that, I'm sure?
At nighttime we'll sit and play games by the hour,
Then you'll smile and be haughty; we'll quarrel, may be
By starlight, and then make it up playfully!
Thou sweet lotus flower, I'll sit all the day
Making sonnets for you—quite *à la Coppée!*
Then, too, we'll read plenty of novels, you'll see!
The gorgeous effusions of great Pierre Loti!
And my hands in yours—so pale lily-white—

Will clasp you so close; oh, I'll hold you so tight—
Thus, dearest, we'll spend all our days in sweet bliss,
Our happiness pure—and our lingering kiss
Will mount up to the skies, where the angels will fear
Competition in joy: for I'll have *you*, my dear!

HÉLÈNE

(*Deeply affected*) Ah, that's poetry!

ACHILLE

It is.

HÉLÈNE

French?

ACHILLE

Of course.

HÉLÈNE

I didn't know—it was *so* beautiful!

ACHILLE

Ah, in place of your colorless existence, see——!
Now you are buried alive!

HÉLÈNE

That's no consolation.

ACHILLE

What consolation can I give you? Useless condolences? When we are confronted by great sorrows we should be as silent as they. We can grasp the hand of a friend and say:

ACHILLE AND HÉLÈNE

(*Simultaneously, as they clasp hands*) Poor dear!

ACHILLE

We were married too soon.

HÉLÈNE

Yet we were in no hurry. Now, there's no remedy.

ACHILLE

(*Forcefully*) No remedy? Doesn't this meeting, only a step from our respective wedding ceremonies, look like Providence?

HÉLÈNE

It seems dreadfully ironical. Ah, if it had taken place only twenty-four hours sooner! Where is happiness now?

ACHILLE

It depends on you and me.

HÉLÈNE

What do you mean?

ACHILLE

Let us fly!

HÉLÈNE

Together?

ACHILLE

Of course. We always think of the simplest things last.

HÉLÈNE

You're mad. You——? Run away with me?

ACHILLE

Yes.

HÉLÈNE

On my wedding day? People don't do that!

ACHILLE

Then what?

HÉLÈNE

Never!—Farewell!

ACHILLE

I can't leave you this way, and allow you to be plunged in unhappiness, despair. You might even kill yourself! Can I leave you in the arms of Des-

barres, whom I don't know, but whom I hate already? And you don't love him, you don't——!

HÉLÈNE

But he loves me. No, I couldn't do it! I couldn't think of deceiving him this way!

ACHILLE

You're not deceiving him: he will know all about it. He won't have room for doubt if you write him: "I don't love you. I am going away." It's as easy as breathing.

HÉLÈNE

It's not so simple as all that. Think of the obstacles: society, my honor, my integrity.

ACHILLE

Illusions, all! In matters of happiness, integrity is not the shortest distance between two points. Would you prefer me to kill Desbarres?

HÉLÈNE

Heavens!

ACHILLE

Or would you rather live with him always—with my image in your heart? (*Sarcastically*) Now that would not shock society so much!

HÉLÈNE

You are terrible!

ACHILLE

Do you know how they did things of this sort five thousand years ago?

HÉLÈNE

(*Losing her head*) No, I was too young!

ACHILLE

I, the primitive man, should have come to you, without clothes——

HÉLÈNE

(*Modestly*) Oh, Monsieur, I hope at least you would have put on a tiger's skin to talk to me!

ACHILLE

Possibly—I don't know.—Well, I should have come to you, the primitive woman, having read the love in your eyes, and I should have carried you off.

HÉLÈNE

But you are not the primitive man.

ACHILLE

That makes no difference! What are civilization, laws, customs? We ought to obey only our dreams. *They* alone are out of time, out of space. Come!

HÉLÈNE

(*Overwhelmed*) I cannot! It's impossible!

ACHILLE

Farewell, little white cottage in the heart of the wood, long walks, sweet conversations, eternal duet of love, the life of dreams——

HÉLÈNE

The living incarnation——

ACHILLE

Games in the evening——

HÉLÈNE

Pierre Loti! Farewell.—Oh, it's horrible! And my husband—there—in that room! He'll come to find me——

ACHILLE

(*Tragically*) The tiger is below, growling for his prey.

HÉLÈNE

(*Half choked*) We seem to be acting *Hernani!* (*Music is heard outside*) Do you hear?

ACHILLE

What is it?

HÉLÈNE

The horn.

ACHILLE

No: the last bars of a slow waltz—or else the lugubrious cry of some street car in the blackness of the night.

[*The sound of a carriage is heard.*

HÉLÈNE

Listen—they're coming!

ACHILLE

No, it's only a carriage stopping at the door. It shall carry us far, far away. Come as you are—it makes no difference.

HÉLÈNE

This is sheer madness.

ACHILLE

No, it's thrilling. Choose—(*Pointing to the door at the back*) A happy life, love, adoration, idolatry —(*Pointing to the door at the left*) Middle-class existence, the end of all poetry, youth, beauty!

HÉLÈNE

(*After a long silence*) What is your name?

ACHILLE

Ah, of course—here it is.

[*He hands her a card.*

HÉLÈNE

(*Puzzled*) Ax——s?

ACHILLE

Ἀχιλλεύς: yes, a student of Leconte de Lisle. Ἀχιλλεύς in Greek; Achille in French. What is your name?

HÉLÈNE

Hélène.

ACHILLE

(*Radiantly*) Oh, joy supreme! The capture of Helen by Achilles: it's so Greek, so antique, so Parisian! Now let us go—they will be here in a moment: your husband and my wife——

HÉLÈNE

But what will *they* do?

ACHILLE

They—they will do likewise!

[*They go out through the door at the back. The moment they disappear the other bride and bridegroom enter, right and left.*

THE BRIDE AND THE BRIDEGROOM

(*Together, as they lift their arms to Heaven*) Oooh!

CURTAIN